

# Wentz Post

*A Publication of the Peter Wentz Farmstead Society*

*Vol. XXXXI, No. 3*

*Fall/Winter 2024*



## ROOTIN' TOOTIN' STEW

1 head of cabbage  
5 carrots  
6 to 8 medium potatoes  
2 medium onions

4 cloves garlic  
2 to 3 lb. ham  
2 (14 oz.) cans chicken stock

Seasonings:

3 bay leaves  
½ Tbsp. black pepper  
½ Tbsp. salt

1 Tbsp. oregano  
1 Tbsp. coriander (ground)

Chop vegetables and combine in a large stockpot. Cube ham and mix with vegetables. Add chicken stock and seasonings. Once ingredients are in pot, fill with water to within 1 inch of the vegetables. Boil for 1 hour.

This is a good stew for cold weather. Serve with crusty bread.

Helpful hints: This stew is better after being refrigerated and reheated.

*Jay Ryan*

In 2004, our Society published a cookbook entitled ***Peter Wentz Cooks***. With colder weather approaching, comfort food comes to mind. That being said, here is a recipe from our own farmer, Jay Ryan. ENJOY!

## 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

### Volume XXXXI, No. 3 Fall/Winter 2024

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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.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*By Joy A. Dolan, Society President*

### **Volunteering...Why is that so important for an organization and for us personally?**

Through my many years I've volunteered at several museums and for me the enjoyment is multifold. My personal interests have led me to primarily historic sites that have captured my sense of connection and have "spoken" to me in some way.

Being surrounded by history, artifacts, knowledgeable people, the beautiful fields, livestock and the smell of fresh hay at PWF are blissful for me. It is a place that tells an amazing story and offers incredible tranquility. It provides a sense of purpose, personal growth, new friendships, community engagement and a feeling of making a difference.

These are some of the personal benefits of volunteering. Another reason is the PWF staff can't do all the many things that tell the story of the Farmstead by themselves. That is where we come in as friends and supporters of the Site.

Our participation can provide many benefits such as promoting awareness and engaging the community. Talk to friends, family, coworkers about your involvement at the Farmstead and invite them to visit and become involved as well.

We all bring new ideas, approaches and perspectives to the table but the willingness to give a bit of time is invaluable.

The needs for Volunteers at the Farmstead vary. How can you help? Where do your interests lie?

Large events like Sheep Shearing in the Spring, Harvest Festival in November and A Wentz Holiday Open House in December have many opportunities, even a 2-hour shift is appreciated. "Many hands make light work" as the saying goes, emphasizing the importance of teamwork. There's something for everyone: Aiding the Demonstrators, Manning the information table, giving tours of the first floor of the house (15 min. each), (training and script provided), assist by answering phones in the office, help in the Museum Shop.

Weekly smaller educational programs are often scheduled with school groups, Questers, and other groups from the greater community.

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of events, programming and the telling of the amazing history of Peter Wentz Farmstead. Our Mission is to support the Farmstead in many ways and in turn you will make new friends, learn new skills, and experience the tranquility of The Farmstead.

Bring a bit of your time and passion to a place we all care about and support!

Reach out to staff members Carly Schmidt or LeAnne Sykes at 610-584-5104.

Together we can make a difference.

## IN MEMORIAM

*By Linda Snyder*

Our sympathy goes out to Phyllis A. Yergey and her family at the passing of her husband, Sherwood L. on June 23, 2024 at home in Pottstown. Born in Gilbertsville, PA, Mr. Yergey graduated from Bloomsburg University and Dickinson School of Law.

He was a practicing attorney at the law firm of Yergey, Daylor, Allebach, Scheffey, Picardi Attorneys-at-Law in Pottstown until his retirement.

Mr. Yergey was a member of several organizations in Pottstown including Grace Lutheran Church and the Elks Club and also served on the board of the Salvation Army in Pottstown.

He is survived by his wife, Phyllis, a son John, daughter Beth, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



## AS SMOOTH AS GLASS: UV WINDOW TREATMENT

### AT THE PETER WENTZ FARMSTEAD

*By Scott Houting, Curator*

Any homeowner knows the damaging effect that long-term direct sunlight has on furniture and other household furnishings. Over time, furniture can bleach out or discolor; upholstery and fabric can fade, and paper turn yellow. The Peter Wentz Farmstead recently completed a preservation project to eliminate up to 99 percent of this damaging sunlight on the furniture and other objects inside the Wentz house.

In early October, the farmstead's staff worked with a local window treatment company, Tint-Pro, to place protective UV film on the farmstead's 1758 house windows. The project went smooth as glass!

After farmstead staff removed the existing Plexiglas storm panels in the house, Tint-Pro technicians installed a 3M UV film called DN35 on each window glass pane. The selected film works to block 99% of the sun's damaging UV rays and reduces the sun's heat penetration by roughly 50%. After allowing the new film to thoroughly dry on the glass, the existing interior panels were reinstalled by the farmstead's staff. The film comes with an 18-to-20-year guarantee against UV ray and heat penetration. Farmstead staff will monitor the UV film on a yearly basis to ensure the film's continued effectiveness against future furniture damage. The placement of UV film on windows is one of the most effective preservation methods to protect historic furnishings in an historic house setting, such as the Peter Wentz Farmstead.

The project was funded, in part, by grant money from the local chapter of the Springhouse Questers organization.





**PETER WENTZ FARMSTEAD  
COLONIAL KITCHEN GARDEN**

*By Lori Curtis, Volunteer Coordinator*

It is always bittersweet to put the kitchen garden to rest for the year, but we are pleased with what a productive season we had. Our crops included green and wax beans, radishes, carrots, summer and winter squash, cabbage, rhubarb, lettuce, Swiss chard, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets and ground cherries. We also grew a variety of herbs, including borage, comfrey, costmary, lavender, lemon balm, lovage, mint, rosemary, sage, tansy and thyme.

This year we had an enthusiastic group of volunteers (known as the Wentz Weeders) who planted, maintained and harvested the crops. I want to recognize and thank Wendy Aughe, Mike Bilinski, Tom Brunner, Wendy Cusack, Laura Danoff, Fred Gockley, Linda Hoade, Sue Holiday, Melanie Kilgannon, Paul Menard, Debbie Schirk, Sandy Sweeney and Nancy Weiman for their many hours of work.

While our volunteers were able to take home vegetables and herbs, the majority of the produce harvested was donated to Manna on Main and Our Daily Bread, two local food pantries. As of the end of October, this amounted to over 450 pounds, compared to 425 pounds last year.

We are already looking forward to next year. We are committed to maintaining the historical accuracy of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania German kitchen garden with appropriate vegetables, herbs, and flowers. We will be writing up a description of the garden for the audio-tour of the Peter Wentz Farmstead and offering tours of the garden at farmstead events, starting with Sheep Shearing Day in April, 2025.



**NEW! A WENTZ HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE**

Saturday, December 7, 10:00am to 4:00pm. Join us for a new event-a holiday open house at the Farmstead! Enjoy holiday crafts like Scherenschnitte, the German art of paper cutting, and create ornaments for a wildlife tree for the birds and squirrels to enjoy. Cooking demonstrations and tours of the house will be offered and children can meet the Belschnickel. Visitors may also visit with the farm animals and check out the museum store for unique gifts. All Ages. Suggested Donation-\$2 pp.

For additional information and updates, go to: <https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/2661/Our-Events>

**THE MUSEUM SHOP WILL BE OPEN  
EXTENDED HOURS FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

*By Amy Dinkel*

The Peter Wentz Farmstead is a wonderful place to visit in the fall/winter, when there's a chill in the air.

A Wentz Holiday Open House will be a highlight of the holiday season on Saturday, December 7, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Holiday Open House is a new event at the farmstead, and everyone's favorite, the Belschnickel, will be on hand to greet young and old! Kids will get to try scherenschnitte, the German art of paper cutting, and create ornaments for a wildlife tree for the birds and squirrels to enjoy.

**The Museum Shop will be open for the Wentz Holiday Open House and on these other dates:**

- November 29 (Black Friday) 12:00-3:00,
- November 30 (Small Business Saturday) 12:00-4:00,
- December 1 1:30-3:30 December 6 10:00-1:00,
- December 7 (**Wentz Holiday Open House**) 10:00-4:00,
- December 8 1:30-3:30, December 13 2:00-4:00,
- December 14 12:00-4:00, December 15 1:30-3:30,
- December 20 12:00-4:00, December 21 12:00-4:00,
- December 22 1:30-3:30, December 27 12:00-4:00,
- December 29 1:30-3:30.

The Museum Shop is filled with great gifts for everyone on your list! We have many new ornaments in the shop as well as clear toy candy, also known as barley candy, which some of you may remember from your childhood.



"Happy Holidays from the Museum Shop."



**MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

*By Joy Dolan*

A lovely Membership luncheon meeting was held on October 24, 2024, attended by approximately 45 PWFS members. A brief meeting was held prior to an engaging presentation by our guest speaker Michael Jesberger, Military Historian.

**MEMBERSHIP MEETING (continued)**

Dave Carhart, Special Events Coordinator introduced our special guest, Alan Shapiro, Army Air Corps who served in the Battle at Normandy. Dave presented Mr. Shapiro with a commemorative coin depicting the Battle of Normandy, thanking him for his Service.

Guests were updated on the upcoming Farmstead events and thanked for the many hours of volunteering they have provided



**WASHINGTON ALSO DINED HERE!**

*By Scott Houting, Curator*

General George Washington and his staff occupied the Wentz house with Peter and his family in October of 1777. What we often overlook is the fact that he also dined at the Wentz household. This forgotten side of the story is about to change.

The Peter Wentz Farmstead, administered by the County of Montgomery, has been awarded a second grant by the Springhouse Questers to build a reproduction of Washington’s famed Dining Mess Kit. The original mess kit, assembled for General Washington in 1776, is maintained by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The dining kit was most certainly with Washington during his five nights and days at the Wentz farmstead.

Working with the farmstead’s talented volunteer, Randy Gilbert, the curator, Scott Houting, built the black-leather covered pine chest, lined with green baize fabric, to display in the main kitchen during the fall of each year. Mr. Houting also worked with a Pennsylvania tinsmith to complete the mess kit with tin boilers, dining plates, platters, and other wares which fit inside the chest. The kit is currently on display near the hearth in the house’s main kitchen.

**OFF-SITE PRESENTATIONS NOW OFFERED**

**BY PETER WENTZ FARMSTEAD**

*By LeAnne Sykes, Museum Assistant*

Did you know that the Peter Wentz Farmstead offers a variety of presentations to off-site locations? Within the last year the Farmstead has increased its outreach efforts by creating new programs that can be scheduled at senior living communities, churches, schools, business luncheons, historical society meetings, and more. Interested hosting a program? Give us a call today!

The Peter Wentz Farmstead currently offers the following presentations:

- Introducing The Peter Wentz Farmstead – learn about the historic site, its past history and present offerings, and how to visit.
- History of Pennsylvania to 1800 – information on Pennsylvania’s rich and exiting history and people from the first residents, the Native Americans to the early years of the United States.

· Life in Eighteenth Century Pennsylvania – explore how colonial Pennsylvanians lived during the 1700s, including social class, the role of women, clothing, cooking, and more. The presentation comes with a traveling trunk of reproduction objects.

· Slavery in Pennsylvania – honor Black History with this presentation about the institution of slavery in Pennsylvania, from the arrival of the first enslaved individuals to the Civil War.

More topics are to come later this year! Interested in a topic not on this list? Please ask for more information!

To schedule a program please contact LeAnne Sykes, Museum Assistant, at [leanne.sykes@montgomerycountypa.gov](mailto:leanne.sykes@montgomerycountypa.gov) or 610-584-5104.



**2024 PHOTO CONTEST**

*By LeAnne Sykes, Museum Assistant*

In September and October, the Farmstead held its first Photo Contest in quite a while. Visitors were invited to take photos of anything on the property – the animals, buildings, fall-colored trees, etc. – and submit one photo to the contest.

The photos were posted on the Farmstead’s social media accounts on Facebook, “X” (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, and followers voted on their favorites. The top three winning photos, as well as a few honorable mentions, will be printed and displayed in the visitor center. Please check our social media pages for contest winners, as well as visit the Farmstead to see the winning photos in person!



(LeAnne Sykes)

2024 PHOTO CONTEST



(AJ Kissiner)



(Jim Nichols)



(Carly Schmidt)



## THE LEGEND OF BELSNICKEL, THE CENTURIES-OLD CHRISTMAS FIGURE FROM GERMAN FOLKLORE

Still celebrated by the descendants of German immigrants in America today, Belsnickel is a menacing character who bears some similarities to Santa Claus — but has a violent approach all his own.

Indeed, Belsnickel has been celebrated by the descendants of German immigrants in the United States for years. The Pennsylvania Dutch regularly include this bewildering figure in their Christmas traditions, delighting in how he punishes naughty children and rewards well-behaved ones.

So where exactly did the legend of Belsnickel come from and what does he do? And how does this Christmas figure differ from others like Krampus?

Belsnickel's origins can be traced to the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany, where he's also sometimes called "Kriskinkle," "Beltznickle," "Pelsnichol," and even the "Christmas woman" because of his sometimes feminine clothing. The name "Belsnickel" itself is a combination of the German word *bels* (fur) and *nickel* (St. Nicholas).

In German folklore, Belsnickel has a somewhat terrifying appearance. He's described as having a face smeared with charcoal and wearing dirty, tattered clothes. Penn Live explains that Belsnickel adorns himself with bits of foliage, fur cloaks and hats, and even deer antlers. In his hand, he carries a switch.

But while the legend of Belsnickel seems a far cry from the legend of Santa Claus — who is generally presented as jolly and smartly dressed in red and white — this German mythological figure does play a somewhat similar role.

What Does The Belsnickel Do? Like Santa Claus, Belsnickel's main role is to determine if children have been good or bad. But he goes about his duties in an entirely different way.

As Penn Live reports, Belsnickel will usually appear at children's homes one or two weeks before Christmas. Instead of sneaking down the chimney like Santa, he'll rap on the windows with his switch. Then Belsnickel will charge into the house and start asking the children if they've been well-behaved.

Children must answer Belsnickel's questions and are sometimes required to recite passages from the Bible. Belsnickel will then throw cakes, candies, and nuts on the floor — but beware! If the children dive for the sweets on the ground, they might get a swat with Belsnickel's switch for being greedy.

In the end, children who have convinced Belsnickel of their goodness will be rewarded. Children unable to answer his questions or prove their good deeds will be punished with his switch.

In the German tradition, which was carried by immigrants to places like New York and Pennsylvania, adults would play the role of this odd Christmas figure by donning masks and furs.

"The annual visitor would make his appearance some hours after dark, thoroughly disguised, especially the face, which would sometimes be covered with a hideously ugly phiz," explained Alfred Shoemaker and Don Yoder in the book *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk Cultural Study*, according to Penn Live.

"He or she would be equipped with an ample sack about the shoulders filled with cakes, nuts, and fruits, and a long hazel switch," the passage continues. "One would scatter the goodies upon the floor, and then the scramble would begin by the delighted children, and the other hand would ply

the switch upon the backs of the excited youngsters – who would not show a wince, but had it been parental discipline there would have been screams to reach a long distance.”

Though the Belsnickel tradition largely faded away after World War II — German traditions plummeted in popularity worldwide following the conflict — it has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in recent years. Indeed, Belsnickel is still heartily celebrated among the Pennsylvania Dutch.

As such, Belsnickel plays an important role in Christmas traditions by holding children to their promise to be good.

From an an article by Kaleena Fraga, published in April 2023

Why not plan to visit the Farmstead on Saturday, December 7, 10:00am to 4:00 pm to join us for a new event-a holiday open house? Enjoy holiday crafts like Scherenschnitte, the German art of paper cutting, and create ornaments for a wildlife tree for the birds and squirrels to enjoy. Cooking demonstrations and tours of the house will be offered and children can meet the Belschnickel. Visitors may also visit with the farm animals and check out the museum store for unique gifts. All Ages. Suggested Donation-\$2 pp.

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