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ADAMS COUNTY  
CHAIR MAKER

Winter  
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Pennsylvania  
Doll life

# Contributors

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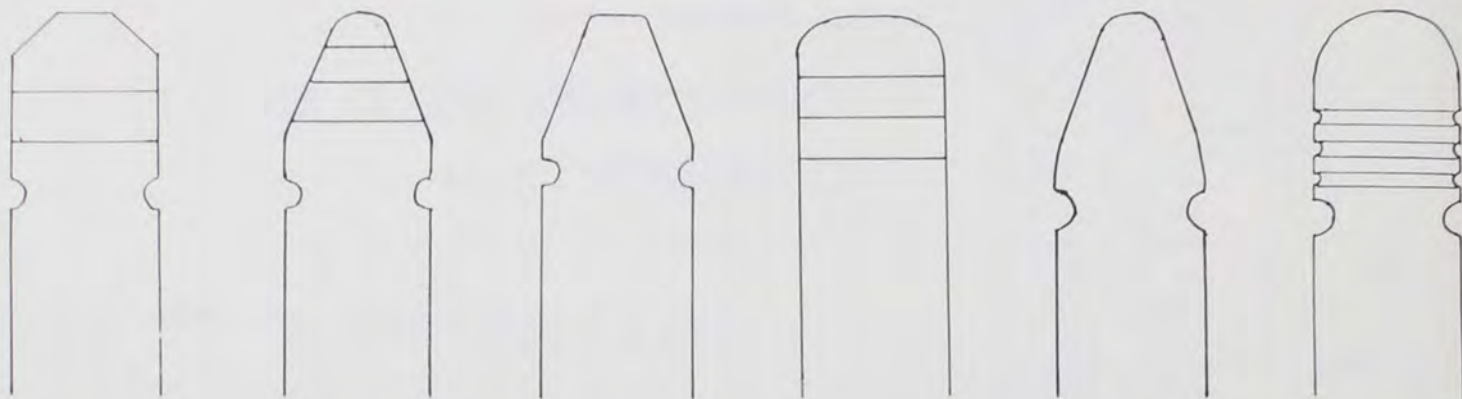
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## COVER:

*Charles E. Starry, Adams County chair maker, plaiting  
the seat of a rocking chair. (Photograph by Simon E.  
Bronner)*

# CHARLES E. STARRY, Adams County Chair Maker

by Wendell R. Zercher



*Fig. 1 Finial designs of (l. to r.): Charles Starry; Arthur Starry; Stanley Shull; many Hunterstown chair makers; Charles Poole; Peter Decker.*

In his essay "Folklife Starts Here: The Background of Material Culture Scholarship in Pennsylvania," Simon J. Bronner considers the singular status of the Commonwealth with its prodigious output of arts and crafts, and affirms the image of the state as a place where "handwork, rural life, and domestic goods"<sup>1</sup> have long been important. He also notes the preponderance of decorative and pre-industrial arts in Pennsylvania; these handmade articles produced in largely agricultural communities bespeak the self-reliance, industry, and practicality of their makers. The fact that so much was produced in small towns, shows, says Bronner, that "in Pennsylvania the idea of community is a material, not abstract, concept."<sup>2</sup> Many of the arts are local or regional in nature, and some local residents today often proudly identify with products peculiar to their own history.<sup>3</sup>

Such is the case in a small area of Adams County in south-central Pennsylvania, an area that once claimed the title of "rocking chair capital" of the nation—if not the world. Practiced worldwide, the craft of chair making is certainly not unique to this locale. What is noteworthy, though, is the extent of local involvement. Begun in Hunterstown in 1830, the industry spread from family to family there and in nearby communities to the north. Speaking of these communities, Louise Little, the seventy-five-year-old widow of former chair maker William Little, recalls that "They used to say [that in] every other house was a chair maker." Today, however, only Charles E. Starry continues to make chairs in the traditional way.

Of Pennsylvania-German extraction, Starry, seventy-eight, is a third generation chair maker as was his older

brother Arthur, who no longer practices the craft. Their father, W. Jobe Starry (1881-1947); uncle, Calvin Starry (1869-1913); and grandfather, Amos Starry (1830-1898), were also chair makers, as was their Aunt Catherine Starry's husband, Peter Decker (1868-1937). These ties, coupled with a lively interest in local history, make Charles Starry keenly aware of his significance as the last chair maker in the area.

## BACKGROUND

Through the process of design and creation, a piece of furniture embodies certain of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the maker and his culture; an often overlooked connection.<sup>4</sup> Examining Charles Starry's role as a transmitter of traditional ideas, methods, and designs, then, means exploring the forces that produced them—the pattern of settlement in the geographical area in which chair making was concentrated, and the social and economic conditions that made the work so attractive.

As already mentioned, the Adams County chair-making industry began in 1830 in Hunterstown, which is northeast of Gettysburg. Over the years it spread to the neighboring communities of New Chester, Hampton, Five Points, and Heidlersburg, an area of roughly fifteen square miles. There were other chair makers in the county, but it was here where, in the industry's heyday, every other family had someone involved in the trade, either full- or part-time. Why it was restricted to such a limited area is not known; part of the answer may be rooted in the attitudes, values, and ethnicity of the region.



*Left: chair made by Peter Decker (1867-1937) of Huntington Township. Right: chair made by William Jobe Starry (1881-1947), ca. 1930. (Courtesy of Charles Starry)*

Scholars have noted the “ethnic content”<sup>5</sup> of Pennsylvania’s arts and crafts, a result of the remarkable diversity of religious and cultural groups which settled the state. Adams County historian Henry Stewart cites the evidence of place names, churches, and graveyards to prove that the county, populated by three major immigrant groups, had a clearly delineated pattern of settlement: the Germans to the east of Gettysburg; the Scotch-Irish to the west of the town; and the English to the north of it. But, while Stewart does demonstrate “a most remarkably distinct cleavage”<sup>6</sup> of settlement areas, these areas were by no means ethnically pure, and as time passed they became even less and less so.

Lying, as it does, northeast of Gettysburg, the chair-making area under discussion here presents a picture of an area where ethnic boundaries were blurred. As evidence of English settlement Stewart mentions various Episcopal and Quaker churches north of Heidlersburg, as well as English place names such as New Chester, Hampton, Huntington, and Reading. As proof of German settlement he cites Osborn’s Cemetery, two and a half miles east of Hunterstown.<sup>7</sup> It, however, has English as well as German family names.

A list of the names of area chair makers also illustrates ethnic integration, although determining ethnicity by name is not always easy. With English the recognized language of the young country, many family names were changed on arrival in America, or in succeeding years. Klein, for example, might have been Anglicized to Kline or Cline, or translated to Little, its English equivalent. Therefore, if the background of each man included in the following



*Hickory settee made by William Jobe Starry, c. 1930; Starry house and workshop in background. (Courtesy of Charles Starry)*



Hickory chair made by Abraham Guise (1852-1939) of Biglerville, ca. 1930. (Courtesy of Charles Starry)



Chair made by Charles Poole (1876-1940s?) of Tyrone Township, owned by Charles Starry, 1989. (All photographs by Simon Bronner unless otherwise noted.)

list were researched, some of the “English” names might end up in the German column. As it appears now, however, the list shows local chair-making activity fairly evenly divided between English and German families:<sup>8</sup>

English—Adams, Chronister, Criswell, Ford, Frame, Jacoby, Kemper, King, Lee, Little, Matthews, Miller, Morrison, Phillips, Poole, Stevens, Thompson, Winand, Wolford.

German—Bowers, Boyer, Crist, Crone, Decker, Eckenrode, Eckert, Englebert, Guise, Harmon, Hiner/Heinard, Hoffheins, Hondeshelle, Hoover, Meckley, Myers, Pittenturf, Reitzle, Shull, Starry, Taughenbaugh, Wagner, Weaver, Wolf.

English or German, most families made their living by farming, and in this respect the area was no different than the rest of the state, for in Pennsylvania at the time agriculture was the bedrock of the economy. In fact, many chair makers were farmers who supplemented their incomes with this or any other work they could find. For many, chair making was a seasonal activity, something to be done during the winter months when farm chores were not pressing. Before the Civil War the Gettysburg area had a well-known and thriving carriage-building industry,<sup>9</sup> but it declined in the post-war years and most Adams County residents continued to engage in general subsistence farming. In fact, it was not until around the turn of the century that there began to be some degree of specialization in agriculture, with fruit becoming the principal crop.<sup>10</sup>

With Gettysburg the only urban center, the county is quite rural today, and even as recently as fifty or sixty years ago most areas of it would have been considered remote. In the 1830s when the chair-making industry began, those living in the Hunterstown-Heidlersburg-Hampton area had little communication with any but their nearby neighbors, and that did not change until around the turn of the

century. Until then each community was economically independent, with a kind of business-center where merchants, tradesmen, and professional people provided goods and services to those in the surrounding outlying areas who made their living by raising crops and livestock.

#### BEGINNINGS OF THE CHAIR-MAKING INDUSTRY

The earliest documented references to the industry are found in John T. Reilly’s *History and Directory of the Boroughs of Gettysburg, Oxford, Littlestown, York Springs, Berwick, and East Berlin, Adams County, Pa.*, originally published in 1880. Describing Hunterstown, the author says “it is noted for its extensive Rocking Chair Works, of which thousands are sold yearly, being mostly purchased by Geo. D. Gitt & Bro. of Hanover, who ship them to dealers in the cities.”<sup>11</sup> His listing of Hunterstown businessmen of the time includes “Wm., Geo. and Harvey Little, Jacob Golloway, F. Morrison, Wm. Harman, Harvey Adams, chair manufacturers”; he adds that the first “chair factories” were started about 1830 by William Little and John Miller.<sup>12</sup> Reilly makes no mention of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the industry (nor does any other historical source), and, although other villages in the vicinity are described, there is no other mention of chair making except in connection with Heidlersburg. Included in the list of businessmen there are two chair makers: J.M. and Johnson Pittenturf.<sup>13</sup>

Although Reilly’s terminology and punctuation might lead a twentieth-century reader to visualize large buildings and assembly line-like methods, that would be a misinterpretation. The only “factories” in the area were the many chair makers’ individual workshops, and these, according to residents who remember the usually humble outbuildings, were rarely larger than twenty by twenty feet. And, although capitalized, “Rocking Chair Works” is not the



name of a large manufacturer, but rather a formal reference to the "extensive" industry of the area.

A later documentation of the industry was published in the weekly *Gettysburg Compiler*, twenty-five years after Reilly's initial observations. A June 28, 1905, article briefly describes the many chairs being made "in Hunterstown and neighborhood, in Heidlersburg and in the vicinity of New Chester."<sup>14</sup> The chairs, many of which were rocking chairs, were made during the winter and sold in the summer. Shipped out daily by the wagon load, most were sent east "through York and Cumberland counties and over the Susquehanna until the supply of the season was exhausted."<sup>15</sup>

Although this article does not specifically say there had been growth in the chair-making trade since 1880, the opening sentence does note that it had "not gone backward in any sense."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the inclusion of Heidlersburg and New Chester might indicate that growth had occurred. The chair-making communities were located in Straban (Hunterstown and New Chester), Reading (Hampton), Huntington (Five Points or Boulder), and Tyrone (Heidlersburg) townships. A check of their national census records from 1850 (the first to list occupations) to 1910 (the last available) confirms this apparent growth, and also provides a valuable picture of life in the past. Not always accurate—names are often misspelled and ages wrong—and sometimes difficult to read, the records nonetheless show the following number of individuals listed as chair makers: 1850, six; 1860, eleven; 1870, thirteen; 1880, twenty-seven; 1900, thirty; 1910, thirteen.<sup>17</sup> (The 1890 census for Pennsylvania was destroyed in a fire.)

Occasionally there is more than one chair maker listed for a household, and when that is the case they are usually a father-and-son combination; there were four of these in 1900. In that year the William Little family had more chair makers than any other. In addition to the fifty-four-year-old head of the family were three sons: Charles, twenty-four; John, eighteen; and Walter, fourteen, the youngest person working in the trade in the four townships. (Samuel Hoffheins, seventy-three, was the oldest.) This seems fitting, for, although they were not all related, there were at least twenty-five Littles from the Hunterstown area who made chairs, beginning in 1830 with William, one of the industry's founders, and continuing until 1955, when Henry Little retired from the business.

Since the criteria for determining occupation are unknown, the significance of the sudden increase in chair makers in 1880 and 1900 is unclear. There does appear to be considerable volatility in the numbers from census to census; a man might be listed as a chair maker one time and a farmer the next. This accounts for the drop which occurred from 1900 to 1910; many characterized as chair makers in the earlier census were listed as farmers in the next, although no doubt many continued to make chairs, if only part-time. Some individuals are listed only once as chair makers, suggesting that, apart from death or relocation, the trade may not have provided for a family's long-term needs as well as farming. And, of course, if

someone were only an occasional chair maker he might never be listed as that on a census record.

## THE AREA'S CHAIR-MAKING TRADITIONS

There have been at least two kinds of rocking chairs traditionally made in Adams County: porch rocking chairs, which have strong posts with little ornamentation and which are supported with wide rockers; and a more refined, or fancier style called by some a parlor rocking chair. These had more ornamental turnings on the posts, fancier finials (the ends of the posts), and narrower rockers. Edith Criswell, a ninety-year-old Hunterstown resident, has several of the latter in her house, while outside she has the heavier porch rockers made by her uncle, George E. Little. One of her parlor chairs, a tall, dark-splint rocker, is at least as old as she is, for she and her siblings were rocked in it as children. It was made by William T. Little (born in 1850), the brother of her grandmother, Susan Englebert. Only the original rockers have been replaced (by Mrs. Criswell's father, Robert Englebert, who was also a chairmaker); the rest of the chair has vase-style turnings, especially on the front posts. Its finials are ball-shaped, with blunt points at the top; a variation of the acorn design.

Mrs. Criswell's neighbor, Nancy Weaver Kammerer, owns two old parlor rocking chairs. Both have several turnings decorating the posts and nicely turned finials. One was made around 1880 by her great uncle, James Bell Weaver, who lived on a farm just north of town. The other, a ladder-back rocker, was made for her grandmother, Abigail King Bell, born in 1831. The maker is unknown, but Mrs. Kammerer believes it was made around 1855 or somewhat later. One of the town's older residents, she remembers seeing, in her youth, many different kinds of locally made chairs in Hunterstown shops.



*Chair made by William Jobe Starry, owned by Charles Starry, 1989.*

Although, as Mrs. Kammerer points out, its craftsmen produced a variety of products throughout the area's long chair-making history, the most popular by far was the plain but sturdy porch rocker. By the time William Little and John Miller began turning out chairs in Hunterstown around 1830, these were becoming popular, and that popularity continued well into the next century, waning finally around 1940. According to Charles Starry, porch rocking chairs reached their peak of popularity during the years of the grand hotels, most of which had long verandas lined with them. Of course that meant the market was mostly outside the local area, but apparently there was an easy sales and delivery arrangement worked out through nearby Hanover in York County, and, later, north through Cumberland County. Starry himself remembers the chairs being sold in resort areas in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, in the Finger Lakes region of New York, and on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

Not only were rocking chairs in demand and the market for them within reasonable distance, the raw materials needed to make them were inexpensive and readily available; wooded areas were plentiful, and oak, hickory, and water ash were easy to find. More important, perhaps, were the implements needed to shape them. Apart from the common cutting and splitting tools, a chair maker needed a shaving horse for rough shaping, and a lathe, indispensable for making posts and rungs. By the early 1900s there were specialized tools—the dowel machine and the splint box—which increased the ease and speed of production. Orville Jacoby, a second generation chair maker, is credited with inventing the splint box and building it for other craftsmen; it turned out the hickory splints woven to make chair seats and backs.

Jacoby also made dowel machines, but when Charles Starry's father first began making chairs around 1924 he did not have such a machine, and rather than laboriously turn out dowels on his lathe, he bought them from Jacoby.

### CHARLES E. STARRY'S CHAIR AND ITS COGNATES

According to Charles Harmon, grandson of two chair makers (Mart Harmon and Charles Galloway), chair maker Bill Matthews moved to the northeast corner of Hunterstown where he set up a sawmill and turned out lumber specifically sized for chair parts. Since this did away with the chores of cutting and splitting wood, and roughing out posts, rungs, rockers, and arms, many chair makers took advantage of Matthews' services.

Charles Starry's chairs are made with the same patterns, or templates, used by his father. In fact, the chairs made by Charles and his brother Arthur appear to be almost identical to those made by W. Jobe Starry. The posts are thick and strong with little ornamentation other than a few lightly cut rings and a "neck"; the only taper is in the upper section of the front posts where they rise from the seat

to meet the arm. The front ends of the arms are rounded and the rockers are wide.

Copying was common among chair makers, even outside the family. Anyone starting his own business had to begin somewhere, so he often simply acquired whatever chair was available (oftentimes a neighbor's), measured and traced its parts, and then reproduced them. This, says Starry, was tantamount "to stealing one's goods," but was done nonetheless and explains the remarkable similarity of design and style of locally made rocking chairs. The most obvious difference among them is the shape of the ends of the posts, or finials. For even though he may have begun by copying, a craftsman wanted his work to be distinctive, and, as Starry points out, the finial is a chair maker's "signature"; that which distinguishes his work from the work of others. Many of the older chair makers used a common finial design, the acorn. Most, however, had their own variation of it. For example, Starry remembers Orville Jacoby's chairs as having fancy turnings on the posts, and an acorn finial "turned pretty thin."

According to Charles Starry there were no aesthetic rules or guidelines used in developing the design of finials; it was rather something each artisan "worked out in his own way," over time. Again, the shape of the finial tended to be similar among members of the same family or among craftsmen of the same area. Starry explains that his are almost identical to his father's, since he is, in effect, continuing his father's business. Brother Arthur's have a pronounced taper above the "neck," with three lightly cut rings. In recent years Arthur's son Douglas has been learning the trade, and his finials are the same as his father's but have one more ring, signifying that he is the family's fourth generation chair maker.<sup>18</sup>

Examining the finial designs of those who were relatives or neighbors of the Starrys shows that, while individualistic, their finials all include the neck cut near the top typical of W. Jobe Starry's work (see fig. 1). Stanley Shull, whose father was Jobe Starry's music-business partner, created a design similar to Arthur's; Charles Poole, a neighboring blacksmith who made chairs to earn extra income, also has a pronounced neck cut below his cone-shaped top; and W. Jobe Starry's bother-in-law Peter Decker's finials have a neck with three heavily cut rings above.

Charles Starry, who lives just outside of Hampton, identifies Hunterstown chairs by their slightly rounded finials which have three or four lightly cut rings (see fig. 1). This was true of the Hunterstown chairs that I saw, although most of these were made by the Little family, who certainly perpetuated the design. Even Henry Little, who moved from Hunterstown to Heidlersburg, continued making it until he retired in 1955.

One finial design turned out by a Hunterstown chair maker is markedly different from the Littles'. Charles Harmon, sixty-four, took me to see three "settin" chairs made by his grandfather, Martin Harmon, originally for the



*Arthur Starry (l.) and William Jobe Starry (r.), ca. 1920s. (Courtesy of Charles Starry)*

ministers and others who sat behind the pulpit of the old Methodist Church, but now moved to the Four Square Gospel Church, east of town. Quite ornate and suggestive of a gothic spire, their finials are four or five ball shapes diminishing in size toward the top, which is a rounded point. Harmon believes this finial design was typical of his grandfather's chairs, and not created especially for the church. He also believes, like Starry, that most Hunterstown chair makers produced finials of a much simpler design, closer to the style of the Littles. And, speaking of design, it is usually impossible to neatly label or make definitive statements about a craftsman's work, which often evolved as new ideas and influences affected him.

### CHARLES E. STARRY'S STORY

Charles Starry does not remember his grandfather making chairs, but he does remember when his father began. After a few other business ventures such as running a general store (ca. 1900-1914) and a music store (ca. 1914-1920), W. Jobe Starry launched his chair-making enterprise around 1924, when Charles was ten years old. Starting with a line of rustic-style settees, flower stands, and tables which were popular in the late 1920s, he eventually began making the traditional porch rocking chair. His shop was a small building on his Five Points property that had been built for his earlier businesses. It is still standing (although it has been moved from its original site east of the house to the house's left rear corner, along Route 234), one of only three chair maker's workshops remaining in the area.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the work, such as the weaving of the seats and backs, was done in the kitchen of the house. Jobe Starry's wife, Clara, always did the preparatory work on these during the day so the children could complete them after school or in the evening. Even neighbor children often joined in, earning a nickel for every seat or back completed.

From its inception in the area, chair making had usually been a family affair, with all members helping in one capacity or another. For a boy growing up in this environment, it would have been natural to continue these craft skills as an adult.

Two of the seven Starry children—Arthur and Charles—did just that. Arthur, the eldest, quickly established his own business, but Charles, thirteen years younger, worked with his father until Jobe Starry's shop was closed in 1939. Jobe Starry was in poor health during the last years they operated the business, and during those years Charles also farmed and had a variety of seasonal jobs (picking apples, cutting and selling Christmas trees, and so forth) as well, in order to earn extra income.

The Depression years of the 1930s had forced more and more local people into the trade as a way of alleviating often desperate economic circumstances. Since money was very scarce bartering was common, with produce or livestock being exchanged for chairs. (These were the years when people claimed that every other family had someone involved in the trade.) By the end of the decade, however, local craftsmen were finding it difficult to compete in price as chairs began to be mass-produced in modern factories.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, with his father's health failing<sup>21</sup> and business suffering because of competition from large manufacturers, it became apparent to Charles Starry that he needed to find other employment. Ironically, he joined the competition, taking a job running a band saw in a furniture factory in Aspers. At the beginning of the Second World War he worked in construction on Army and Navy bases before taking a job in 1943 as a carpenter and maintenance worker at the Navy Depot in Mechanicsburg. He retired from there in 1978.

Arthur Starry had also left the trade for another job, but resumed it when he retired, turning out chairs until the mid-1980s, when he became infirm. Looking for an



Completed "sewing chair" made by Charles Starry, 1989.

activity to fill his retirement years, Charles, at the urging of friend Stanley Shull, also a chair maker, demonstrated a splint-making machine at the annual Colonial Day Festival in nearby East Berlin. Inherited from his father, the machine is used to shave the edge of a board and so produce the long, one-sixteenth-inch-thick strips woven to make chair seats and backs. The interest of his audience rekindled his own interest in chair making—something he had not done since 1939.

After Stanley Shull died his widow gave his lathe and boring machine to Charles Starry, who then acquired the other power tools necessary to reestablish the chair-making business he had left so many years before. He now makes bar- and footstools; straight kitchen arm and side chairs; baby rocking chairs (for children); sewing chairs (low, armless rockers); and, of course, traditional Adams County low-back rocking chairs as well as high-back rockers, a modern innovation. Arthur Starry was one of the first in the area to make them and Charles, appreciating their comfort, adopted them. Both styles have a pleasing interplay of rectilinear and curvilinear lines. The back posts rise untapered with a backward pitch, while the front posts mimic the movement in miniature. The curve of the arms is repeated even more strongly in the curve of the broad rockers, and the horizontal lines of the stretchers tie everything together. They are not fancy, but they are handsome chairs.

Based on old patterns familiar to him from boyhood, Charles Starry's rocking chairs are made with woven seats and backs, or with long, molded slats which run from the top of the back to the front of the seat. The one-and-three-quarters-inch-round front and back posts have very little ornamentation, but give the chairs a strong, solid look. On the high-back rocker the front posts are twenty-one and one-half inches long, and the back posts forty-five and one-half inches long. (Those on the low-back rocker are four inches shorter.) Only the front posts have a slight inward taper, starting at the seat and extending up to the arms. As already mentioned, the shape of a chair's finials are



High-back rocking chair made by Charles Starry in 1989.

a chair maker's "signature," and the top edges of the back posts on Charles Starry's chairs are heavily chamfered, giving them a rounded appearance. A "neck," or cove, is cut into the posts about two and three-quarters inches from the top, and four lightly cut rings are scored into the posts; two above the neck and two below.

The shape of a chair's arms—whether the front edge is square or rounded—is another identifying feature; a Hunterstown chair, for example, generally has square arms. On a Starry chair the arms are somewhat curved or bowed as they extend forward from the back posts, and their ends are rounded. One inch thick at the back, the arms reach a maximum of three and three-eighths inches in width as they balloon toward the front.

The chair sits on two broad rockers, with the width extending in a horizontal plane. This gives the chair a solid, heavy look, visually anchoring it firmly to the floor. The rockers are about two inches wide and one inch thick, extending thirty-one inches from tip to tip. They extend twelve inches beyond the back posts, but only two and



*Wetting reeds, 1989*



*Reed-splitting machine, 1989*

one-quarter inches beyond the front posts. (While these flat rockers were traditionally used as far back as the late nineteenth century, another style was also used by early chair makers. Perhaps a more primitive form, it was called a "cheese rocker" and had a vertical orientation. These rockers stood on edge like a knife blade or cheese slicer—hence the name—and were about three inches high and three-quarters to seven-eighths inches wide. They were usually fitted into slots cut in the bottom of the chair legs and pinned in place, but a cruder method of attaching them was by bolting them to the outside of the chair legs.)

To join the chair posts to each other Starry uses stretchers, or rungs, employing fourteen of these dowel-like members in one chair: one just below the neck of the finials; five below the seat—two in front, one on each side, and one in back; and eight to make forms for weaving—four each for the seat and back. All the rungs are seven-eighths of an inch in diameter, but those between the front posts are twenty-one inches long, while those between the the sides and back are only seventeen inches in length.

Traditionally, an Adams County chair maker used hickory (and sometimes oak and water ash) splints as weaving material for chair seats and backs. Finding a tree with a trunk largely free of knots or blemishes (called "cat faces" by Starry) he quartered it lengthwise, cut out five-eighths-inch boards, and from these sliced splints—one-sixteenth-inch shavings—the length of the board. This was the job done by homemade splint boxes.

It is difficult today to find wood of a size able to yield splints long enough for weaving, so most modern craftsmen use synthetic or imported materials. Arthur Starry, though, wove almost exclusively with paper during his last years of work, and Charles tried it too, and then plastic, but now uses a reed made from the Asian rattan tree and imported



*Charles Starry bending slats, 1989.*



*Plaiting, 1989*

from Hong Kong. Five-eighths of an inch wide, it comes in random lengths and is flat on both sides. He finds it the best choice since it closely resembles the traditional hickory splint.

Just like a weaver of cloth who first strings his warp threads (a process called "chaining" by Adams County chair makers) and then passes over and under them with weft threads, so also does the chair maker weave his splints or reed. Charles Starry uses a herringbone weave for his seats, and a diamond weave for his chair backs. To show off these designs, he immediately colors the warp threads with Minwax, a commercially available wood stain, using a shade determined by the wood of the chair. Then the unstained weft threads are woven in (a process called "plaiting"), contrasting with the chaining and highlighting the pattern. (Because it was cheaper, Jobe Starry used red, green, or blue shingle stain to create his two-color designs; he also experimented with a commercial fabric dye, but it washed off in the rain.) Just before the last strands of reed are plaited into place Starry stuffs hay (dried bluegrass) into the seat, using an old, worn hickory "stuffing stick" with a notched end; the same stick he used in the 1930s. This stuffing makes the seat firmer and longer lasting, for it distributes the sitter's weight evenly, above and below, and reduces the strain on the reed.

The herringbone pattern was the weave typically used by local craftsmen, although it was sometimes known by other names; William Little's widow, Louise, remembers it being called "fence row." Charles Starry tells of a visit, around 1925 or 1926, by a relative from Ohio, Jacob Hoffman. He taught Jobe and Arthur Starry the diamond weave, which they immediately incorporated into their work. To capitalize on the fact that it was unique in the area, they used it in the readily visible chair backs.

As a rule Adams County craftsmen used oak, ash, and hickory for their chair frames, but today Charles Starry uses mostly oak, a good choice since it is imperative that the wood be strong. He buys one- and two-inch kiln-dried oak from a mill in Path Valley; the two-inch stock comes in random widths and lengths, but is usually two by eight or two by ten, in twelve-foot lengths. Using a table saw, Starry rips these boards into two-inch-square lengths for chair posts, and also cuts them into curved rockers on his band saw. The one-inch stock is used for chair arms—also cut on the band saw—and is cut into one-inch-square lengths on the table saw; these pieces are used to make rungs.

Starry shapes the two-inch post material on the lathe, but runs the one-inch rung stock through a dowel machine. He had been using his father's old machine, made to be powered off a tractor by the use of a flat belt, but since the tires on his 1939 Farm-All tractor blew out last year and are nearly impossible to replace, he has been forced to renovate a former chair maker's old, homemade dowel machine. A metalworker helped him to adapt it to run off an electric motor instead of a flat belt, and Starry outfitted it with new cutting knives. Equipped with ball bearings, it runs smoothly and he likes it better than the old machine; it is easier and more convenient to use.



*Charles Starry in his workshop making posts, 1989.*

Feeding the one-inch-square lengths into one end of the dowel machine, Starry uses an old, wooden hand clamp to pull the finished seven-eighths-inch dowels, or rungs, out the other end. It is a fast and efficient operation; the newly made rungs are fairly smooth and need little or no sanding. (Since Starry makes chairs mostly for outdoor use, a perfectly smooth surface is not necessary.<sup>22</sup>) A five-eighths-inch tenon in each end finishes the rungs: mounting a socket-shaped cutter on his old boring/tenon-cutting machine (the one acquired from Stanley Shull), he pushes the rungs into it to produce tenons of the proper length and diameter. They must be cut exactly, so they will be a perfect fit for the holes bored in the posts.

To make the posts, Starry first passes the two-inch-square lumber over the joiner at an angle, to round off the four corners. He then mounts each piece on the lathe and “dowels” it from end to end in one pass, using a cleverly rigged assembly: whereas each rung was cut by passing it through a stationary cutting tool, a moving cutting tool shapes each post while it remains stationary (although spinning sideways) on the lathe. The cylinder-shaped cutter encircles the wood, and, as Starry pushes it along the entire length of the piece, a perfect post emerges. Light sanding is all that is needed to finish it.

Before he removes the post from the lathe, Starry cuts the neck of each finial by hand with a gouge, and uses a gauge marker—a stick with sharpened nails protruding from the sides—to mark off the points where the holes will be bored. He holds the gauge marker against the spinning post to lightly score the hole positions (these cut rings do not sand out completely, and appear on the finished chair). Removing the post from the lathe, he clamps it into a self-centering cradle assembly mounted



*Turning post on the lathe, 1989*



*Hammering rung into post, 1989.*

on the boring machine. Holding the post perpendicular to the drill bit, the cradle slides in a way that enables the post to push against the bit at each score mark, resulting in quickly and accurately bored holes.

Starry then assembles the chair by: 1) joining four rungs to make the back frame, and then plaiting the back; 2) framing this assembly into the back posts, along with three other rungs; 3) joining the front posts with three rungs; 4) boring holes in the assembled front and back for the side rungs; 5) joining the front to the back with the side rungs; 6) plaiting the seat of the assembled chair and stuffing it with hay; 7) attaching the arms and securing them with four nails; and 8) mounting the chair onto the rockers and securing the through tenons of the posts with four wedges.

Although he says its surface is actually a bit soft to stand up well under all the pounding, Charles Starry assembles the chair posts and rungs on a low-standing, eight-inch-square pine "framing bench" acquired from his brother Arthur. Wooden pegs protrude from the bench top, and the posts are tightly clamped between these with a wedge and the rungs driven into the post holes. Surprisingly, no glue is used; each mortise and tenon has been so accurately measured and cut that all the joints fit tightly.



*Starry in storage room with sewing chair (l.) and slatted rocker, 1989.*

Indeed, it requires a heavy hammer to drive all the parts together. (If too tight, however, the rungs may split out the posts, especially near the ends.) Four finishing nails, to keep the arms from separating from the back posts; four oak wedges, to keep the tenoned post ends from pulling out of the rockers; and a coat of stain complete the job.

Although stained, the chairs should also be varnished or painted if used outside; otherwise, mildew can be a problem, especially on the splint seats and backs. Traditionally, the chairs were sold unfinished, and Starry recounts one case where deception was used to sell a craftsman's wares. "Strong" Eckert assured prospective customers that a painter was following behind him, and he would paint the chairs any color desired. This would help clinch the deal, but of course the purchaser never saw any painter.

And, speaking of tradition, the foregoing description makes it clear that while Charles Starry uses time-honored techniques and methods, his tools are distinctly modern. Early machines normally had a treadle operated by hand or foot; a laborious operation. Later, chair makers used a horse to turn a gear box which turned a lathe or saw. This was followed by the gasoline engine, which usually powered an overhead line shaft that transferred power to various machines in the shop by means of belts; this was the system used when Charles Starry and his father were in business together.

Starry's present workshop takes up half the space in an outbuilding located behind his house. The other half is a garage which houses a tractor, a wagon, machinery, and a stock of completed chairs and stools. All of the one-inch lumber is stored in the loft above the shop, while the two-inch stock, too heavy to be lifted up there, remains outside on the macadam driveway, covered with plastic. The hay and reeds are kept in a small shed attached to the rear of the building.

Twenty by twenty feet, with two side windows which give light and a feeling of openness, and with a stove for





*William Jobe Starry with chairs, ca. 1926. (Courtesy of Charles Starry)*

heat in the winter, the workshop is more than adequate for a chair maker's needs. It is well-filled with many purchased electric power tools: hand tools like drills, grinders, and a router; and floor model machinery—a joiner, band saw, table saw, shaper, combination disc and belt sander, radial arm saw, planer-molder, router table, and drill press. The lathe and boring/tenon-cutting machine are homemade and came from Stanley Shull's workshop; the homemade dowel-cutting machine from another area chair maker's workshop. Some of Starry's tools are mounted on homemade cabinets or tables so they can be moved if necessary.

### CHARLES STARRY'S LEGACY

As a young man, Charles Starry accompanied his father and brother on selling trips to resort areas in Pennsylvania, New York, and Maryland. Taking as many as ninety-six chairs at a time, they knocked on doors during the day and slept in barns at night, trying to sell their entire stock during the week so they could get back home by the weekend. During the 1920s and 1930s, their chairs sold for about \$2.50 to \$3.00 each.

Today Charles Starry gets \$85 for his top-of-the-line high-back rocking chair. He does not advertise, apart from his chair-making demonstrations at the annual Colonial Day Festival in East Berlin. People pick up his cards there, and then call or come to his shop with orders throughout the year. This customer contact seems to be important to him; dealing directly with the buyer is, after all, the "old way" of doing business. When he sees that a purchaser is pleased with a chair it encourages him, and makes him feel his work is worthwhile.

When asked if he would like more business, Starry laughingly says "No"; for a retiree he is too busy already. When he takes an order he feels pressure until it is completed; he is not the kind of person who can let work accumulate without feeling anxious. Some days he works from early morning until after the evening meal. "I should taper off," he says, "but it is pretty hard to do." He admits he finds it difficult to say no to a customer.

He does receive a great deal of personal satisfaction from his work. Recognizing that he has made concessions by using modern tools and materials, he nonetheless feels he is perpetuating a traditional craft and producing a useful, quality product appreciated by his customers. The work aligns him with a historic brotherhood of craftsmen, which further enhances his pleasure. On Colonial day in 1990, seventy-three-year-old Mearl Myers of Spring Grove, Adams County, spoke to Starry with obvious fondness and pride about his grandfather, James Ford, who made splint rockers just outside of Hunterstown. As a teenager in the early 1930s, Myers would visit and watch him make chairs. The sight of Starry's chairs recalled his own youth, and for a short time the two men experienced a kinship rooted in a common memory.

The stories of these regional artisans are more than simply a matter of local history for Starry; they are part of an important family story as well. No matter how he felt about the trade when he left it in 1939, today it is imbued with deep significance as a Starry-family tradition. It is because of this family pride that he and his brother Arthur would be pleased to see a son, grandson, or nephew continue in the business. It would be an affirmation of the personal investment made by them, and by their father and grandfather before them.

While taken with the historical significance of his craft and of his own place within the story, Charles Starry struggles with the demands of the business itself. When he first returned to chair making he was looking only for a hobby. Now, however, his business has grown to the point where he feels constant pressure to meet customer demands. Instead of the anticipated leisurely pace of retirement years, he finds himself burdened with a job that has become all-consuming; a job he would like to turn over to a relative. His only hope in that direction lies with one or both of his daughter's sons, who so far have only talked about learning to make chairs.

In addition to his work as a chair maker, Charles Starry is a member of the Adams County Historical Society and remains committed to its mission. He has compiled a list of chair makers discovered through research and discus-

sions with others, and given the Society his father's old chair-maker's lathe and splint box. He intends to further supplement their collection by giving them Stanley Shull's boring/tenon-cutting machine. By making pertinent gifts, volunteering time, and speaking to local groups, he is making a significant contribution to the county's understanding of its past.

Indeed, Starry's efforts should be credited with rescuing the subject from obscurity, for today, regional chair making is a topic only vaguely familiar to most people in Adams County. With the local industry dying out in the 1940s, few under the age of sixty have any memory of it. And even those over that age have no first-hand experience; it is only a subject mentioned in passing and relegated to that category of obscure topics discussed by "old-timers."

And yet, during this final decade of the century, there are still many who have either grown up in a family whose members made chairs, or who have memories of a relative or neighbor who did. Occasionally these people are still in possession of a chair, now a family heirloom, made by a grandfather, father, or uncle. Oftentimes there is a nostalgia associated with the chair which makes it a cherished possession; an enduring piece of family history which still renders practical service in the home.

Pointing to these deep roots of the chair-making trade in the area, Starry is able to tell the story of their meaning for many of the families in local communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By doing so, and by continuing to make chairs and preserve the tools of the trade, he calls attention to a vital part of local history and contributes to a greater understanding of our rich and varied cultural landscape.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply appreciative of Charles E. Starry's generosity in allowing me to study his craft and learn of his family and community experiences. Always cooperative and helpful, he shared an interest in recording the chair-making story for others; my debt to him is large. Many other Adams County residents, too, particularly in the Hunterstown area, opened their homes to show me chairs and offer me help. I am thankful for their openness and generosity in providing information which helped to "fill in the empty spaces."

And, for providing support and guidance when this study ran aground, and for offering consistently deft editorial judgment, I am most grateful to Dr. Simon J. Bronner. I also thank Dr. Irwin Richman for the astute, forthright manner in which he shaped my awareness of the decorative arts. Finally, to not thank my wife, Faith, would be an unforgivable oversight. For her support and faith in me, I am most grateful.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Simon J. Bronner, "Folklife Starts Here: The Background of Material Culture in Pennsylvania," in *The Old Traditional Way of Life*, ed. Robert Walls (Bloomington, Ind., 1989) p. 284.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup>Jules D. Prown, "Style as Evidence," in *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* (Chicago, 1980), Vol. 15 (Autumn), pp. 197-210.

<sup>5</sup>Bronner, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Stewart, "The Settlement of the Adams County Area," typescript, 16 leaves, Gettysburg, 1941.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* The 1886 *History of Adams County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago), reprinted 1977 by The Bookmark, Knightstown, Ind., also includes a fourth group, the Dutch.

<sup>8</sup>See Appendix I for a complete list of individual chair makers. Many

of these names have been furnished by Charles Starry. A former Gettysburg College student, Katherine Sawyer, supplemented the list based upon research in the Adams County Historical Society. In addition, many names were added by my examination of the federal census records for Pennsylvania (1850-1910), and by interviews with residents of the Hunterstown area.

<sup>9</sup>"In 1830 there were no less than 10 or 12 shops, employing 130 workmen, with a product not worth less than \$40,000 annually." Robert Fortenbaugh, "Notes on the History of Adams County, Pennsylvania," typescript, 27 leaves, Gettysburg, 1949.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* According to Fortenbaugh the first "carlot shipment" of apples was exported from the orchard of Noah Sheely near Cashtown in 1893.

<sup>11</sup>John T. Reilly, *History and Directory of the Boroughs of Gettysburg, Oxford, Littlestown, York Springs, Berwick and East Berlin, Adams County, Pa., with Historical Collections* (Westminster, Md., 1976), reprint of the 1880 edition, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup>*Gettysburg Compiler*, no. 44, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>See Appendix II for a complete list of chair makers for each census.

<sup>18</sup>At age thirty-six Douglas Starry works full-time elsewhere, but makes chairs and other furniture for customers as time permits. He hopes to build up a clientele and then go into business for himself.

<sup>19</sup>Another shop belonged to Jake Kemper and is located along Coleman Road just east of Hunterstown. Also positioned to the left rear corner of the house, it is unusual since it is one of the few workshops with two floors. The unpainted building is in very poor condition and may not last much longer. A third shop used by J. Armstrong Eckert still stands at his former residence in Hunterstown. Originally a log school-house located outside of town, it was dragged into town on skids to its present location. According to the present property owner, it was sided with weatherboard and whitewashed. Sometime during the intervening years an owner installed a garage door in the front and extended the building to the east by adding two garage bays. The entire structure therefore is now quite large, and sided with gray shingle, but the western third of the building is Eckert's original shop.

<sup>20</sup>In addition, metal chairs became fashionable and rocking chairs began to fall out of favor. These pressures forced most families out of the business. One family, the Jacobys, formed a larger, more modern furniture factory which is still in business today, although they no longer make the traditional porch rocker. Orville Jacoby's sons, Orville, Jr. and Glenn, run the "chair factory" along with help from their sisters; Hazel works full-time, while Ethel works part-time.

<sup>21</sup>W. Jobe Starry died of cancer in 1947.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur Starry had an unusual way of smoothing his rungs. He built a long, octagonal "tumbling box" which could revolve on an axis driven by an electric motor. The unfinished rungs tumbled against each other as the box turned, smoothing off the rough spots.

#### APPENDIX I

Inclusive list of Adams County Chair Makers\*

Name	Wife	Dates	Township	Father
Adams, Harvey	Alice	1858	Straban	
Bowers, Leander	Eva	1840	Straban	
Boyer, Martin	Mary A.	1848-1937	Tyrone	John
Crist, Allen G.	Blanche	1881-1944	Huntington	Albert
Chronister, Louis	Eliza/Susan	1815/1820?	Reading	
Criswell, Frederick L.		1845	Straban	Jacob
Crone, Jacob E.	Lavina	1849	Tyrone	
Crone?, Reuben	Susan	1843	Straban	
Decker, Charles B.	Mary	1859-1928	Straban	Henry
Decker, Henry/Harry?	Mary	1827	Straban	
Decker, Henry (Harry)	Henrietta	1867-1937	Tyrone	
Decker, John	Annie	1857	Straban	Henry
Decker, Peter J.	Catherine	1868-1937	Huntington	Henry
Eckenrode, Harry S.		1879	Tyrone	Samuel
Eckert, J. Armstrong	Susan	1860	Straban	
Engelbert, George	Elizabeth	1835	Straban	
Engelbert, Huber	Bernice	1897	Straban	Robert
Engelbert, John	Susan C.	1845	Straban	John?
Engelbert, Robert H.	Cora E.	1876	Straban	John
Ford, George W.	Mary Ann	1841	Straban	
Ford, James	Dora		Straban	
Ford, James W.	Mary J.	1840	Straban	

Name	Wife	Dates	Township	Father
Frame, John	single	1828	Straban	
Galloway, Charles	Lizzie	1868	Straban	<u>Jacob</u>
Galloway, Jacob	Rebecca	1834	Straban	<u>Joseph</u>
Galloway, James	Anna	1879-1945	Straban	<u>Jacob</u>
Galloway, John		1835	Straban	<u>Joseph</u>
Galloway, John C.	single	1874	Straban	<u>Jacob</u>
Guise, Abraham	Christiana	1852-1939	Butler	William
Guise, George W.	Emily	1850	Huntington	
Harmon, Henry		1864?	Straban	William?
Harmon, Jeremiah	Annie	1847	Straban	Henry 1820
Harmon, John W.	Jane L.	1848	Straban	Jacob?
Harmon, Martin	Ella	1876	Straban	
Harmon, William	Mary?	1841?	Straban	Henry? 1820
Hiner/Heinard, Henry M.		1841	Reading	Samuel?
Hoffheins, Samuel		1827	Huntington	
Hondeshelle, George	Martha	1817	Reading	
Hoover, Odus			Tyrone	
Jacoby, John W.	Elizabeth	1865	Butler	
Jacoby, Orville	Ruth	1894-1966	Butler	<u>John W.</u>
Kemper, Emanuel	Catharine	1833	Tyrone	
Kemper, Hayden J.	Ora B.	1877	Straban	<u>Emanuel</u>
Kemper, Jacob L.	Sadie E.	1866	Straban	<u>Emanuel</u>
Kemper, William A.		1890	Reading/Straban	
Kemper, William	Martha	1857	Tyrone	
King, Abraham	Harriet	1840	Straban	Jacob
King, Robert A.	Annie G.	1868	Straban	<u>Abraham</u>
Lee, George R.		1876	Straban	<u>Thomas H.</u>
Lee, Thomas H.	Sarah	1851	Straban	
Little, Charles E.	Grace	1898	Straban	<u>George E.</u>
Little, Charles C.		1876	Straban	<u>William T.</u>
Little, David	Nancy	1801	Straban	
Little, David M.		1880	Straban	<u>S. Henry</u>
Little, George E.	Nancy M.	1871-1964	Straban	<u>S. Henry</u>
Little, George W.	Mary	1852	Straban	<u>Henry 1812</u>
Little, Gervis		1892	Straban	<u>S. Henry</u>
Little, Guy	Vertie	1896	Straban	<u>George E.</u>
Little, Harry E.	Zora	1894	Tyrone	<u>George E.</u>
Little, Harvey (Henry?)	working ca. 1880		Straban	
Little, Henry	Margaret	1833	Straban	
Little, Henry	Orpha	1812	Straban	Henry 1773
Little, John	Margaret	1819	Straban	
Little, John		1810	Straban	
Little, John E.		1882	Straban	<u>William T.</u>
Little, John E.	Nancy	1801	Straban	
Little, John E.	Hannah/Mary J.	1831	Straban	<u>David?</u>
Little, John William		1873	Straban	<u>George W.</u>
Little, R. Merle	single	1902	Straban	<u>George E.</u>
Little, Roy C.	single	1886	Straban	<u>S. Henry</u>
Little, Samuel Henry	Sarah	1845-1936	Straban	
Little, Walter L.		1885	Straban	<u>William T.</u>
Little, William	working ca. 1830		Straban	
Little, William T.	Annie E.	1850	Straban	<u>Henry 1812</u>
Little, William G.	Louise	1908-1986	Straban	<u>George E.</u>
Matthews, David F.	Annie	1869	Straban	Theodore
Matthews, William H.	Margaret	1870	Straban	Theodore
McFarling, Walter			Berwick	
Meckley, Marion	Elizabeth	1858	Straban	
Miller, John	working ca. 1830		Straban	
Morrison, Frederick	Annie Eliza	1845	Straban	
Myers, Noah	Mary	1864	Huntington	
Phillips, Glenn			Reading	Frank
Phillips, Merle			Butler	Frank
Pittenturf, Johnson		1835?	Tyrone	
Pittenturf, J.M.		1801?	Tyrone	
Pittenturf, Milton	Margaret	1831	Tyrone	James M.
Poole, Charles	Laura	1876	Tyrone	
Raffensperger, Henry	Caroline	1843-1937	Huntington	Moses
Reitzle, George			Hamilton?	
Shull, Stanley	Carrie	1904	Tyrone	William
Starry, Amos	Mary E.	1830-1898	Huntington	John
Starry, Arthur	Grace/Nora	1901	Butler	<u>W. Jobe</u>
Starry, Calvin W.	Sarah J.	1869-1913	Huntington	<u>Amos</u>
Starry, Charles E.	Isabelle A.	1914	Reading	<u>W. Jobe</u>

Starry, W. Jobe	Clara L.	1881-1947	Huntington	<u>Amos</u>
Stevens, John	Sarah	1843	Tyrone	
Taugenbaugh, Jacob	Nancy	1849	Straban	Armstrong
Thompson, Hall	Mary E.	1856	Straban	
Wagner, William	Sarah?	1822-1899	Hamilton	
Weaver, James Bell			Straban	
Winand, John	Rebecca	1818	Tyrone	
Winand, Socrates	single	1850	Tyrone	<u>John</u>
Wolf, Jacob	Mary Ann	1826	Reading	<u>James</u>
Wolf, James	Polly	1805-1855	Reading	
Wolf, James	Mary	1800	Reading	
Wolford, George F.	single	1860	Straban	<u>Jesse</u>
Wolford, Jesse	Sarah Jane	1840	Straban	
Wolford, Reuben	Maria	1859	Tyrone	

\*Names have been gathered from all possible sources and have not been definitively examined and verified for accuracy. Various sources do not always agree as to names and dates. The underlining of a father's name indicates that he also was a chairmaker.

## APPENDIX II

### Chair makers found in Federal census records (1850-1910) for Huntington, Reading, Straban and Tyrone Townships\*

#### 1850 Census

**Reading Twp.:** Hondeshelle, George, 32; Chronister, Lewis, 35; Wolf, James, 50. **Straban Twp.:** Little, David, 49; Little, Henry, 38; Little, John, 31.

#### 1860 Census

**Reading Twp.:** Chronister, Louis, 40; Wolf, James, 55; Wolf, Jacob, 33. **Straban Twp.:** Decker, Henry, 34; Frame, John, 31; Galloway, John, 26; Little, John, 40; Little, John E., 29; Little, John E., 59; Little, Henry, 27; Little, Henry, 48.

#### 1870 Census

**Straban Twp.:** Criswell, Frederick, 25; Crone?, Reuben, 27; Engelbert, George, 35; Engelbert, John, 24; Frame, John, 41; Galloway, John, 35; King, Abraham, 30; Little, Henry, 58; Little, John, 39?; Little, John, 60; Morrison, Frederick, 25?; Wolford, Jesse, 34. **Tyrone Twp.:** Kemper, Emanuel, 37.

#### 1880 Census

**Straban Twp.:** Adams, Harvey, 22; Bowers, Leander, 40; Decker, Henry 52; Decker, John, 23; Engelbert, John, 34; Ford, George W., 39; Ford, James W., 40; Frame, John, 51; Galloway, Jacob, 45; Harmon, Jeremiah, 32; Harmon, John W., 32; King, Abraham, 39; Lee, Thomas H., 29; Little, George W., 27; Little, John, 61; Little, John E., 50; Little, Samuel H. 34; Meckley, Marion, 22; Morrison, Frederick, 35; Taugenbaugh, 29; Wolf, Jacob, 54; Wolford, Jesse, 41. **Tyrone Twp.:** Kemper, William, 23; Pittenturf, Milton, 49; Winand, John, 62; Winand, Socrates, 30; Wolford, Reuben, 21.

#### 1900 Census

**Huntington Twp.:** Decker, Peter, 32; Guise, George W. 49; Hoffheins, Samuel, 73; Myers, Noah, 35; Starry, Calvin, 30. **Straban Twp.:** Decker, Charles, 40; Decker, Harry, 72; Frame, John, 71; Galloway, Jacob, 66; Galloway, John C., 25; Galloway, James, 20; Harmon, Martin, 24; Kemper, Jacob, 33; King, Robert A., 31; Lee, George R., 24; Little, J. William, 26; Little, S. Henry, 54; Little, David, 19; Little, George E., 28; Little, William, 50; Little, Charles C., 24; Little, John E., 18; Little, Walter L., 14; Matthews, David, 30; Matthews, William, 29; Thompson, Hall, 46; Wolford, Jesse, 60; Wolford, George, 40. **Tyrone Twp.:** Decker, Henry, 32; Eckenrode, Harry S., 21.

#### 1910 Census

**Huntington Twp.:** Decker, Peter J., 42; **Reading Twp.:** Heinard, Henry M., 69; Kemper, William A., 20. **Straban Twp.:** Eckert, Armstrong, 49; Galloway, Charley, 42; Galloway, John Calvin, 35; Galloway, James, 31; Kemper, Jacob L., 42; Kemper, Hayden J., 33; Little, Samuel Henry, 63; Little, Roy, 21?; Little, Gervis, 18; Matthews, William, 39; Wolford, George F., 50.

\*Not every township has a chair maker listed in every census.

# LEWIS MILLER'S CHRONICLE OF YORK: A Picture of Life in Early America

by Charles Greg Kelly

The two Sycamore trees in Philadelphia Street one Snyder planting the trees Ann 1740. old Snyder was the father of Polly Waltham. Cutting down the trees in 1860. April 26. But the tree of Peter Mandorff. 1809. Before the house, is in thickness large 20- ten feet up from the pavement is a peach tree on it in the forks, in time of September full of good peaches. In gigness the large st in York of the --- Sycamore.



W. McDaniel, the heaviest and weight in the county of York. 1802.

1829. Samuel Leitner, and William Holsheimer, Making Rocket powder, for fireworks, and the hole combustible blew up in his Apothecary Shop, it caught fire by stumbling about with the candle.



McDaniel. Living four miles from Clow. on the Hopewell road, York Township.



Anthony Rice, the unfortunate man sawing a limb of a Cherry tree where he was seated on, down he came Roaring most terribly, his was a downjeller - hat his arm and leg, York Borough 1807. Corner of Philadelphia and Duke Streets

Sketch 1 (All of the Miller sketches used with the permission of the Historical Society of York County)

Lewis Miller (1796-1882), though a carpenter by trade, was among the most important 19th-century folk painters. No doubt, the "high" art community considers his work quaint, crude, or primitive, in keeping with the elite's generally condescending view of folk artists and craftsmen;<sup>1</sup> nevertheless, Miller's significance lies in his remarkably candid portrayal of the people and milieu of York, Pennsylvania, his hometown. For more than fifty years, Miller produced copious notes and sketches vividly depicting everyday life in York. Approximately 2,000 of his drawings, many with detailed captions, comprise his multivolume *Chronicle of York*.

Lewis Miller clearly incorporates folkloric material into his water-colored drawings. One picture, for instance, shows a Yorker sawing the cherry tree limb on which he is sitting ("down he came Roaring most terribly, this was a down-fallen—hurt his arm and leg" [sketch 1]). Miller's rendering of this incident echoes traditional numbskull tales,<sup>2</sup> but his work involves much more than intermittent snatches of folkloric material. His *Chronicle* is a panoramic record of the culture in which he lived. In effect, Miller presents a detailed, personal ethnography of 19th century York. As Donald Shelley observes: "Miller desired to record truthfully the daily life, customs, and dress of the Yorkers, and to show the impact of major happenings and civic events upon York. Pages are crammed with fascinating and homely details of everyday life which would be impossible to document today in any other way. . . . In becoming "The Chronieler of York, Pa." Lewis Miller also became the chronieler of rural life in America from 1800 to 1882."<sup>3</sup>

Most of the events documented by Miller are not filtered through second-hand reports; rather, they come from first-hand observation. On the title page of *Chronicle of York* he writes: "All of this Pictures Containing in this Book. Search and Examin[e] them. The[y] are True Sketches. I myself being there upon the places and Spot and put down what happened. And was close by the Greatest number. Saw the whole scene Enacted before my Eyes."<sup>4</sup> It is doubtful that Miller personally witnessed all of the events that he claims to have,<sup>5</sup> but his *ich-Bericht* (ego account) lends authenticity to the material.<sup>6</sup> Whether Miller actually observed these incidents or not, his sketches capture fully the atmosphere of old York and the character of its citizens. So Miller's work offers a refreshing alternative to the often biased perspectives of the art, architectural, and cultural historians (an elite minority writing *about* the elite *for* the elite). The kind of information Miller supplies in his writing and sketches focuses intently on the vernacular and the local; consequently, it is eminently more valuable to the folklife researcher.

Lewis Miller's parents were among the vast number of German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania (his mother hailed from Heidelberg and his father from Württemberg). Lewis, the youngest of the ten Miller children, was born in 1796 and, except for his travels abroad, spent his entire life in York. Typical of early immigrant communities, Miller's York was an environment of change

and adaptation: some identifications with the father country were sloughed, whereas others were tenaciously retained, and all the while immigrants were assimilating aspects of American life. To be sure, the syncretizing of German and American culture in York produced a fascinating social landscape—much of it documented in the pages of Miller's *Chronicle*.

Even more far-reaching than Miller's portrayal of immigrant culture is his documentation of industrialization in York. In his lifetime, Miller witnessed York's transition from an agricultural toward an industrial community. America at that time "was just beginning its great transition from a nation of farmers and craftsmen to a nation of factories and mechanized power. Miller's drawings show what the country was like at the start of that change."<sup>7</sup> The chronological span of Miller's life allowed him to document the expanding influence of modernization in York, and the concomitant decline of pre-industrial, agricultural society.

Agricultural communities fostered the "old traditional way of life":<sup>8</sup> self-sufficient farms, cooperative community labor, extended families living together, and numerous traditional craftsmen. In Miller's York, especially in his earlier years, there were still quite a few families living the "pure" agricultural life;<sup>9</sup> these families lived further from town than most other York inhabitants. One example is the Geiger family, whom Miller visited on June 15th, 1810. The folklife researcher would be hard pressed to find a better description of the self-sufficient farm than that given by Miller:

I Paid A Visit to the Three Brothers, the[y] are Bachelors by the name of Geiger, Conrad, Paul, and Peter, the[y] are living in Windsor-township, six and A half mile from town. their they do all the work what Belong to house keeping, their own kooking and washing, Spining, thread and weave on the loom, make clothing to Dress. And do their own Smith work. And farm a few Acres of land—In wheat and Corn, for bread, which is made to support life, and have a fine garden, and Orchard of All kind of fruit trees, and a Stand of Beehives were Bees are kept for the Honey. and to make a little money, the[y] make and Burn Charcoal, and sell them in town. The[y] have horces, Cows, Sheep—Hogs, Chickens—and Turkeys, one Acre of ground that lain idle for Some years, all over Spread and full of Strawberrys (sketch 2).

In addition to Miller's caption, the picture shows a grindstone for sharpening axes and other tools. The three brothers no doubt inherited the land from their parents. There was no reason for the Geigers to move into town, as did many other Yorkers about that time, for all of their needs were met on the farm. They burned the charcoal to make potash, used commercially in the production of glass and soap, as well as for scouring wool. The money



*The Geiger Family, And Lewis Miller.*

Sketch 2

they earned from the charcoal, one of the few items of commerce on the farm, possibly went toward property taxes or to craftsmen in town in exchange for other necessary farm implements.

Miller also recalls an 1802 visit, made with his older brother, to another farm. It was "the farm of Susanna Spangler. And her Brother Yargle Spangler, One mile from town. In 1802, Joseph Miller, and his little brother Lewis Miller. was Send to the place for Some Vinegar. A—Gallon—our money was not plain on the face without the

full Impression worn of, it was A—Spanish quarter dollar. She saying I won't take it So much Rubt and Smooth. Joseph had to run home for a plain quarter, and I remained at the house—till he came back" (sketch 3). We can see that the Spangler house is built with the traditional German wattle and daub technique. The encompassing rail fence, similar to that at the Geiger place, was designed presumably to keep cattle out of a kitchen garden (although no livestock are shown in this sketch, only a rooster and chicken).



*I was fond of being present were od, and strange people are. and, So many living in the County, of such kind, and manners. Curious in there dress and ringlet checks. what ideas in such people.*

Sketch 3

*Jacob Greenawalt, Butcher, told him. You Herman,  
if you - got more of light Butter at home you better  
grease your Wagon with it 1831.*



*The Marketmaster taking and Seize the Butter of A farmer  
by the name of Herman, it was not the full weight - lacking  
to be A full-pound, and the whole Basket full of - his butter  
was taking on Market morning. The Corporation law is to  
forfeit all when it not hold out A full pound, the Marketmaster  
sells it as it is to people, And the money is put in the Bourroughs  
treasure.*

Sketch 4

From Miller's portrayal, it is doubtful that the Spangler place was self-sufficient to the same extent that the Geiger farm was. I argue this for several reasons. First, the incident at the Spangler homestead reflects a capitalistic tendency; that is, Mrs. Spangler's insistence on keeping Lewis as collateral until Joseph returned with "acceptable" money is more indicative of the business atmosphere in downtown York than of the trusting, cooperative exchange characteristic of a more rural, traditional way of life. (We can

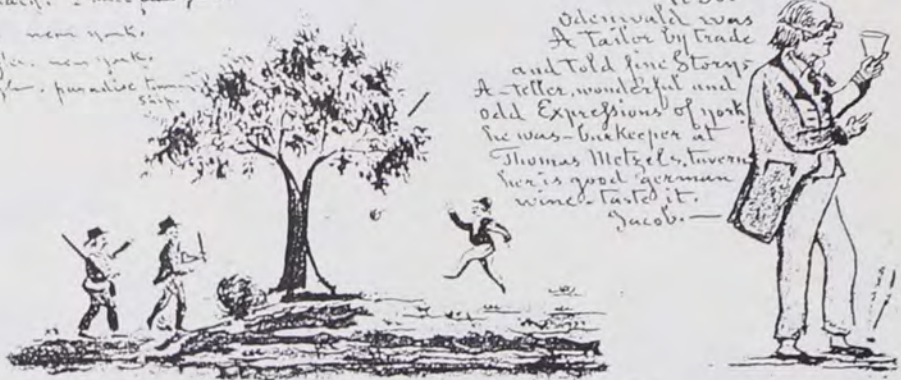
compare a later incident recorded by Miller in which a local farmer is reprimanded and punished according to "corporation law" for bringing "light butter" to market [sketch 4]). In the second place, the Spanglers had less need to be self-sufficient because of their proximity to town. Only one mile from York, the Spanglers could have easily visited town regularly for supplies that they could not produce themselves (unlike the Geigers, who lived four-and-a-half miles from town).

Names of Spanglers, not of the family of old Baitzers, Bros.

old Susan & Jacob, near York.  
 old Jonas & Ruden, 2 miles from York.  
 old Philip Cameron, near York.  
 Thomas Spangler, near York.  
 old Michael Spangler, Paradise town.

Mr. Odenwald at  
 the house of  
 Thomas Metzels.  
 1830.

Odenwald was  
 a tailor by trade  
 and told fine stories  
 A-teller, wonderful and  
 odd expressions of York.  
 he was-keeper at  
 Thomas Metzels, tavern.  
 here's good German  
 wine. tasted it.  
 Jacob.



The Gunning party. Joseph Miller, John Huatt,  
 Henry Lamb, in Spanglers meadow, thrown apples down,  
 and had his gun laying on the ground, on a little ridge and  
 hopping round the tree, and step upon the gun, as the gun went  
 and shot Miller in the thigh, he soon recovered this  
 was in the year, 1806, at John Spangler for nine to sack Spring

Conrad Geiger, winson, and Paul, and Peter, the three Brothers, bachelors  
 1807.



1829.

1808 and 1809,  
 the road made to Maryland,



old Mrs. Stoufferberger  
 looking out of her -  
 window. What is he  
 ringing his bell for,  
 who, for a woman,  
 now I tell you come  
 home, you old crows,  
 and look out for  
 yourself, and know -  
 better.

See Rouse's mill, and the deepness  
 at the hollow - filling it up to make  
 the turnpike road to Ser. Excavated,  
 it was done by Jonathan Jessop, and  
 George Small, managers.  
 Rouse's Apple trees had to suffer  
 Recording even your errors will be of benefit,

Sketch 5

Furthermore, in the accompanying script to this painting, Miller supplies helpful information concerning the modernization of transportation in York: "the—place is now, At this time were the Baltimore pike road run by, at that time the road run at Jacob Fisel's meadow over the hill, and a Lane only run by Susanne house, and Rouse's mill, it was all covert with wood onley a few Acres clear land, it running into the Borough line all wood land" (sketch 3). Miller's observations are consistent with trends of development in the 19th century. The countryside was gradually depopulated as the cities rapidly increased—in both geographical size and population.

The progress of transportation was instrumental in

changing the face of the American frontier. Developing road networks extended out further and further from urban centers, giving rural people easier access to towns; this expansion enticed individuals away from their agricultural self-sufficiency, and encouraged dependence on towns for necessities as well as for jobs and education. In one painting Miller recounts the building of the road to Baltimore: "1808 and 1809, the road made to Maryland, See Rouse's Mill and the deepness at the hollow—filling it up to make the turnpike road—over. Excavated, it was done by Jonathan Jessop, and George Small, managers. Rouse's Apple trees had to suffer. Recording even your errors will be of benefit" (sketch 5).



the volunteers Companies from Baltimore  
paying a visit to the old north point boys in York  
the 12. of September 1843.

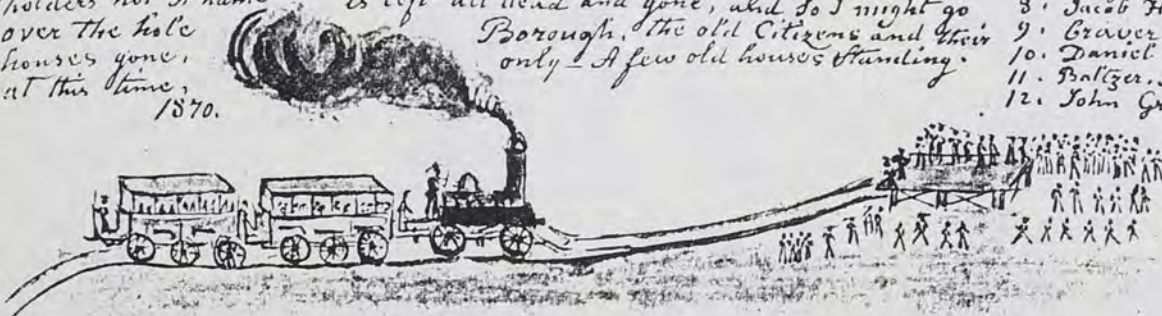


Accident on the rail road that day some of the Baltimore ins.  
the dinner was given at Samuel W. P. Linn woods -



1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12.  
from Dinkel's corner up to the Center Square, - all of this property  
holders not a name is left all dead and gone, and so I might go  
over the hill houses gone, at this time, 1870.  
Borough, the old Citizens and their  
only - A few old houses standing.

- No. 1. Peter Dinkel, house.
2. John Eichelberger.
3. Mr. Fossyth.
4. Michael Westner.
5. Thomas Taylor.
6. Mr. Rummel.
7. George Steeg.
8. Jacob Hany.
9. Grever - Shop.
10. Daniel Spangler.
11. Baltzer, Spangler.
12. John Grever.



Rail road cars. from Baltimore, the first come to  
York in the year 1838.

Sketch 6

In his cryptic last sentence it is not clear what Miller perceives to be the error that he is recording: perhaps he is suggesting that building the road itself was an error—or simply that the apple trees were inadvertently destroyed. In any case the fact remains that the essence of rural life was seriously affected by the continued development of roads, which brought the cities to farmers—and vice versa. And with the growing momentum of modernization, the roadways encroached ever outward.

An even more pervasive influence on early America was the emergence of the railroad system, one of the most significant advances of the Industrial Revolution. The trains brought to towns all sorts of supplies and manufactured goods; it became less expensive to have many items shipped in than to produce them locally. The phenomenon drastically transformed the role of the local craftsman. As Warren E. Roberts observed: "It was not the progress of manufacturing but the progress of transportation that determined whether a craftsman could still receive a decent return for his work. As long as transportation costs were high, the purchaser who lived some distance from a factory could often buy an item made locally by a craftsman more cheaply than the manufactured item. During the second half of the nineteenth century, cheap and efficient transportation spelled doom for the age-old system of craft production wherein the craftsman produced items as needed for his

own neighbors."<sup>10</sup> In York, the transition may have begun even earlier; the paramount event of the first train entering town, as Miller records it, occurred in 1838 (sketch 6).

The modernization and business climate of town naturally attracted craftsmen, who often embraced the opportunity to work their trades full-time. Earlier, most individuals had been primarily farmers; any craft talents they possessed were used to service the needs of a single farm, or of those close-by within the tight agricultural community. They were, in short, farmers foremost and craftsmen second. In the growing towns, however, craftsmen could sell their services to a diverse clientele. Although it may have been lucrative for some, the migration of rural craftsmen into the towns was another blow to the old traditional way of life.

Miller was among a burgeoning group of craftsmen who learned a trade in town as a primary vocation, disconnected from the agricultural life that was so vital to more rural craftsmen. Indeed, Beatrice B. Garvin and Charles F. Hummel have noted the distinctions between the Pennsylvania German farmers, farmer-craftsmen, and city craftsmen.<sup>11</sup> At a young age, Miller apprenticed as a carpenter under his brother John. Lewis worked at this trade some forty years, and had a hand in constructing most of the public and many of the private buildings that sprang up in York during his lifetime.<sup>12</sup> One entry in the *Chronicle*,

# Lewis Miller Carpenter,

working At the Trade for  
Thirty years, In South Duke Street, York, p. a.  
done work for the Citizens, and County-



Commissioners- at  
the Court house Jail  
poor house and county  
office and Bridges,  
and for the Borough  
at market house &c &c  
for the Lutheran  
congregation at the  
houses and church.  
David Lundis,  
mr. Miller, weaver,  
Henry Ernst,  
James Conley,  
Abraham Greenwalt,  
Daniel Baumgardner.

- names of work done.
- |                    |                        |                   |                   |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| George Geistweit.  | John Gardner.          | Jacob Schindel.   | Elmors Stillinger |
| George- Jacobs.    | Jacob Misse.           | John Beck.        | John Schormaker.  |
| John N. Kolb.      | William Eichelberger.  | Henry Heurtzog.   | mr. Hillart,      |
| Henry Smyser.      | John Voglesong.        | miss. - Graf.     | Jacob nell,       |
| Peter Small.       | Dr. William Mc Allvain | John Graber.      | widow-            |
| William Spangler.  | John Kuntz.            | Samuel Jay.       | Polly Wagner.     |
| Henry Sheffer.     | George Coucks. Miller. | Samuel Leedy.     | Richard Porter.   |
| Michael Welsh.     | Michael Ash.           | Jacob Spangler.   | Spangler Kuntz.   |
| Philip Waltemyer.  | Peter Debart.          | George Spangler.  | George Spangler.  |
| Daniel Billmyer.   | Peter Rupp.            | Jacob Spangler.   | capice.           |
| Joseph Kraft.      | Benjamin Lanier.       | George Brickel.   | Jacob May.        |
| Richard Koch.      | Lewis Getz.            | widow Dritt.      | Jacob Stair.      |
| John Rouse.        | Jacob Decker.          | old Zellor.       | Mathias Stroman.  |
| Peter All.         | Miss. Luttman.         | Conrad Beck.      | Henry Sheffer.    |
| Michael Bentz.     | William Rease.         | Jacob Laumaster.  | Joseph Kolb.      |
| Jacob Heckert.     | Christian Miller.      | withaniel Bailey. | John Kolb.        |
| Frederick Hibner.  | Adam Miller.           | Miss. C. Schram.  | Noah Kolb.        |
| John Hibner.       | George Small.          | Jacob Gardman.    | Peter Amptinger.  |
| Joseph Falis.      | Philip Small.          | Abraham Gardman.  | mr. Bamix.        |
| Jacob Bussler.     | Samuel Brooks.         | Samuel Mayer.     | polle wagner.     |
| George Epply.      | Polly Stroman.         | Jacob Rupp.       | William Barber.   |
| Jacob Frey tailor. | Elisabeth Billmyer.    | Lewis Kuntz.      | widow Gatlhouse.  |
| Henry Wagner.      | Martin Spangler.       | Youst Kuhl.       | Gottlieb Ziegel.  |
|                    | Martin Bowler.         | Martin Boyer.     | Jacob Baumgard-   |
|                    |                        | Robert Fisher.    | George Brickel.   |
|                    |                        | Cooper Oram.      | Cable Miller.     |
|                    |                        | Matthew Hear.     | Lewis Wampler.    |
|                    |                        | mr. guently.      | George Sheffel.   |
|                    |                        | Mises, fisher.    | widow Amicee.     |
|                    |                        | " "               | " "               |

Sketch 7

"Lewis Miller, Carpenter, working At the Trade" (sketch 7), pictures Miller's shop, with a few of his woodworking tools: a large and small auger, flat drawing knife, typical handsaw and narrow compass saw, brace and bit, measuring stick, chisel, hooked knife, wooden mallet, hatchet,

joiner's hammer, grindstone for sharpening, glue pot, woodworker's bench with vise, and the wood plane that Miller is using. Also crowded onto the page are the names of more than one hundred people for whom Miller had worked. The impressive list of patrons suggests Miller's

success as a professional carpenter, part of York's rapidly expanding business community. It is not surprising that Miller would assume such a vocation since, after all, he lived his entire life in and about downtown York.

The *Chronicle* gives us glimpses of other York craftsmen as well. One painting, for example, shows the town sawyer, Adam Knertzer, plying his trade (sketch 8). The sawyer's job entailed mainly cutting rough timber logs into planks and beams. Before the advent of such advances as saw pits or sawmills, the sawyer relied heavily on the old sawbuck, or sawhorse, to secure lengths of wood as they were being cut (as Knertzer does). Of particular interest here is the saw being used by Knertzer. It is a traditional bow saw, sometimes called a frame saw. The blade is kept taut between the wooden cheeks of the saw by means of a tightly wound cord and a toggle stick. The blade on Knertzer's saw appears to be fixed—unlike many other bow saws with blades that can be turned up to ninety degrees in order to cut across wide planks, or turning saws with thinner blades. At any rate, Knertzer's saw clearly is a "German-type saw," comparable to that shown by Roberts in his article "German People—German Tools?" And like the carpenter, the German immigrant sawyer "would have a few saws of the British type on hand to take care of the occasional cutting task where the central brace of these German-type saws would get in the way."<sup>13</sup> Miller's sketch confirms the logical assumption that Knertzer's fixed-blade bow saw was used primarily in cutting logs and boards to length on the sawbuck. Doubtless, he had a large battery of other tools to meet the requirements of his trade (axes, different saws for ripping, adzes for smoothing planks, etc.).

Our hope alone!  
Temple in thy name,  
a living Cornerstone!



Sketch 8

Similarly, sketch nine pictures George Stoll, York cooper, at work. Though Miller includes the drawing ostensibly to show Stoll's peculiar habit of befriending and naming wild pigeons (Miller was "fond of being present were od and Strange people are" [see sketch 3]), the sketch intimates significant information about the craft of coopers. Stoll sports an apron, made of either leather or heavy fabric, typically worn by coopers to protect their clothing while constructing the casks. He is trussing the cask, a process in which hoops are forced down tightly around the staves. Stoll hammers down the top hoop of the cask, known as the cap or chime hoop, with perhaps the most important tool of the cooper trade, the adze. Serving a dual purpose, the adze has a squared poll on one end of the



Millerhouse  
Confectioners

John George Stoll. Cooper 1807. well known by his Pigeon's name's commonly calling them, Fan tail, Ring dove, Raven, Ruffle, Crupper, turnstone, & Common - Philadelphia Street.



Sketch 9

head for hammering (as Stoll uses it here); the other end is a narrow blade designed for shaping and paring wood surfaces. The adze was particularly useful for the cooper because after pounding on the hoops, he could use the other end of the same tool to trim the beveled edge on the top edge of the cask staves, known as the chive or howel. This beveled top, along with a guiding groove, would accept the tightly fitting head of the cask—an especially important feature for “wet” coopers, whose casks were made to hold and transport liquids.<sup>14</sup> The cooper’s adze, as we can see from Miller’s sketch of Stoll, was also characterized by its sharply angled, short handle, which enabled the craftsman to shape the howel bevel with one hand within the confined radius of the cask.<sup>15</sup> The cooper had in his shop several adzes, each designed for different stages of constructing a cask (including perhaps a nailing adze, notching adze, rounding adze, and a cooper’s sharp adze). The adze required deft handling, for the cooper was often swinging the blade toward his own body. As one woodworker quipped, “the adze is the only tool that the devil is afraid to use.”<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the heavy cooper’s apron was probably added protection against injury.

Another craftsman, George Adam Gosler, cabinetmaker, is shown curiously taking a hatchet to one of his own pieces, a tall case clock (sketch 10). Miller explains: “George Adam Gosler, Cabinetmaker, he made A fine Clock Case for Baily—when it was done Mr. Baily he scruplet About the price, it was to high for the gentleman. My work is good. A few words said. Gosler—took his hatchet and Cut the case all in Splinters—Sooner—then let it go under his price—out of his Shop.”

Extreme though it seems, Gosler’s destroying the clock ironically evinces the great pride he took in his work; he would ruin the piece rather than sell it for what he clearly considered an insultingly low price. The mishap is amplified by the fact that he apparently destroyed not only the case, but also the works of the clock. The internal works were not crafted by cabinetmakers, who made only the cases, but by clockmakers proper. In fact, as John Joseph Stoudt argues, “there were no true clockmakers in early Pennsylvania . . . the parts were manufactured abroad and shipped knocked-down, assembled here, and then fitted into American-made cases.”<sup>17</sup> So Gosler’s anger appears especially vehement as he was willing to destroy clock parts which were undoubtedly valuable to him, if only to place in another clock case. More significantly, the incident points to a fundamental conflict for craftsmen in the early 19th century. As already noted, improving transportation made importing even such items as case clocks much less expensive. Local craftsmen felt a competitive crunch because of the cheaper, mass-produced goods shipped in from the east. With regard to case clocks specifically, Earl F. Robacker observes, “For all their importance, utility, and charm, tall case-clocks necessarily remained expensive, since they were, so to speak, custom-made. Thus, when an eminently satisfactory portable time-keeper appeared, made by mass production and attractively priced, the old-time handcraftsman was compelled to go out of business.”<sup>18</sup>

Smaller, less expensive mantle clocks manufactured in New England saturated the market, and became common enough “to be considered article[s] of household furniture.”<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, prices charged by local cabinetmakers like Gosler for elaborate case clocks may have seemed exorbitant by comparison—or the cabinetmakers simply may have been forced to raise prices proportionately as compensation for lost business.<sup>20</sup> Although Miller, uncharacteristically, omits the date of this incident, we can infer that it probably occurred sometime between the 1820s



Sketch 10

*George Adam Gosler, Cabinetmaker, he made A fine Clock Case, for - Baily - when it was done Mr. Baily he scruplet About the price, it was to high for the gentleman. My work is good. A few words said. Gosler - took his hatchet and Cut the case all in Splinters - Sooner - then let it go under his price - out of his Shop.*

and about 1850 (by which time "the era of the Pennsylvania tall case clock had passed"<sup>21</sup>).

Thus we see that Miller's witty, personal sketches can give us tremendous insight into the work of traditional craftsmen. The foregoing is just a sampling of the varied scenes presented by Miller in his *Chronicle*; these sketches are all taken from Robert Turner's volume *Lewis Miller: Sketches and Chronicles*, which itself represents only a small fraction of Miller's total work. Pictured elsewhere

in the kaleidoscopic *Chronicle* are images of other craftsmen, among them a blacksmith, potter, tailor, locksmith, weaver, coppersmith, carpenter, and shoemaker. Miller is to be credited for including the "homely details that made up the fullness of life" and for "[illustrating] in lively fashion the customs and manners of his day."<sup>22</sup> His depiction of York is delightfully vivid and honest. In all, it is a skillful portrayal of *real* life—and as such, an invaluable resource for folklife studies.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For an elegant counter-argument to this elite bias, see Henry Glassie's *The Spirit of Folk Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, 1989), especially pp. 92-228.

<sup>2</sup>See Thompson motif J2133.4, and Aarne/Thompson tall tale type 1240.

<sup>3</sup>Donald A. Shelley, "Lewis Miller: an Introduction," in *Lewis Miller: Sketches and Chronicles*, ed. Robert B. Turner (York, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of York County, 1966), pp. xii-xxii.

<sup>4</sup>All quotes from Miller are rendered as they appear in the pages of his *Chronicle*, with the spellings and sometimes capricious punctuation transcribed exactly.

<sup>5</sup>See Donald A. Shelley, "Lewis Miller: 1796-1882," in *American Folk Painters of Three Centuries*, eds. Jean Lipman and Tom Armstrong (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1980), p. 125 and Preston and Eleanor Barba, "Lewis Miller: Pennsylvania German Folk Artist," *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society Publications*, vol. 4 (1939), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Compare Linda Dégh and Andrew Vazsonyi, "The Memorata and Proto-Memorata," *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 87 (1984), no. 345, pp. 225-239.

<sup>7</sup>"A Carpenter's Lively Views of Crafts and Creature Comforts," *Life*, vol. 39 (1955), no. 3, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup>The phrase "old traditional way of life" is used extensively by Warren E. Roberts, sometimes abbreviated by him as OTWOL. The concept is clearly related to the work of Robert Redfield; see, for example, Redfield's *The Little Community* and *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>9</sup>Jared Van Wagenen, Jr., *The Golden Age of Homespun* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 164-5; see also Amos W. Long, "Some Early Rural and Domestic Industries in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife* vol. 40 (1990), pp. 65-68.

<sup>10</sup>Warren E. Roberts, "Folk Crafts," in *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 236-7.

<sup>11</sup>Beatrice B. Garvan and Charles F. Hummel, *The Pennsylvania Germans: A Celebration of their Arts, 1683-1850* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1982), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup>Barba and Barba, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup>Warren E. Roberts, "German People—German Tools?" *Chronicle of the Early American Industries Association*, vol. 40 (1987), no. 3, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>See Kenneth Kilby's *The Cooper and his Trade* (London: W&J Mackay Ltd., 1971), for a detailed examination of coopers and its history.

<sup>15</sup>See R. A. Salaman, *Dictionary of Tools used in Woodworking and Allied Trades, c. 1700-1970* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Salaman, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>John Joseph Stoudt, *Early Pennsylvania Arts and Crafts* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1964), p. 133.

<sup>18</sup>Earl F. Robacker, *Touch of Dutchland* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>19</sup>From Rees' *Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature* ca. 1820, quoted in George H. Eckhardt, *Pennsylvania Clocks and Clockmakers* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1955), p. 25.

<sup>20</sup>Robacker (p. 29) discusses the work of one cabinetmaker that serves as a good example here. John Turn, from Monroe County, Pennsylvania (approximately 125 miles northeast of York) sold clock cases for five dollars in 1813 and by 1816 had increased his price drastically to sixteen dollars. The increase was probably an effort to offset the losses Turn had incurred because of dwindling demand—another repercussion of the infiltration of smaller, cheaper, mass-produced clocks.

<sup>21</sup>Eckhardt, p. 64.

<sup>22</sup>Barba and Barba, p. 14.

# FAMILY ANECDOTES FROM A GEORGES CREEK HOME

by Robert P. Stevenson

*This is the second of a series of articles that Pennsylvania Folklife is presenting under the general heading of "Oldtime Tales From Georges Creek."*

My cousin, Charles Alexander Stevenson, loved a good story. In fact, he was full of them. As a prominent educator and teacher in and around Morgantown, West Virginia, he was often called upon to make a speech. Shortly before he died on February 28, 1980, he put down his favorite stories on paper and gave me a copy.

Many of the stories date back to the early 1800s when our great grandfather, Ellis Bailey Stevenson Sr., had a fulling mill along Georges Creek a few miles upstream from New Geneva, Pa. Georges Creek empties into the Monongahela River at New Geneva. This Fayette County village is located about a dozen miles from where the river enters southwestern Pennsylvania from West Virginia.

One of Charley's tales involved grandfather's fulling mill. A disastrous flood swept away most of the mill in 1859. But an important part of its equipment remained—the water turbines that drove the mill machinery. These had been hauled across the mountains about three-quarters of a century before. They still were in working order.

On a quiet Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1879, a couple of the Stevenson boys—Jesse Walton (Charles' father) and Ellis Jr., my grandfather—decided to demonstrate the turbines for the benefit of visiting cousins. Now, let's let Charles continue the story:

"Ellis, being the older, opened the sluice gates that permitted the water to flow from the dam into the turbines, setting them into motion. As my father related it, all hell then broke loose! Once the turbines were at full speed, their whine could be heard for miles, at least three.

"The entire countryside was suddenly transformed from a tranquil Sunday into bedlam. It was not too difficult to open the water gate, but it could not be closed so easily. All of the menfolk in the vicinity came on the double. As related to me, the whine of the turbines must have sounded much like a modern jet plane—close-up.

"Finally, the men working together managed to close the water gate and stop the infernal noise."

\* \* \*

When first married, Charles' grandfather, Richard Gregg Stevenson II, lived with his wife, the former Susan Moore, on a farm adjoining the original mill farm. Returning home from a shopping tour to New Geneva one Saturday afternoon, Dick Stevenson came upon his wife walking along Georges Creek turning over flat stones as fast as she could.

"Not sure what was happening," Charles related, "my grandfather stopped the buggy, got out, and hurried down to the edge of the stream. 'Sue,' he called, 'what the hell

are you doing?' Without looking up, my grandmother replied: 'Hunting hellgramites for bait. See that string of pickerel! They're biting on hellgramites.'

"Before the husband and wife had stopped fishing, they had a washtub full of fish."

\* \* \*

Like all boys down through the ages, Dick Stevenson's sons enjoyed a coon hunt several times a year. Other boys in the neighborhood came along.

"One that my father told me about," Charles said, "took place in the fall, perhaps mid-November about the year 1875. The meeting place for the hunters was a ridge above Tom Cat Hollow. When all the hunters had assembled and it was about time to turn the dogs loose, someone noticed that one of the boys—Ike Ganoe—was barefoot.

"Aren't you cold, Ike?" someone asked him. 'No,' replied Ike, stamping his feet on the frozen ground. 'I've got on two shirts and two pairs of pants. If'n I had a pair of gloves I'd be all right.'

"The hunt was very successful. Uncle Ellis, the rifleman, shot four coons out of very tall trees. A fifth lodged in the fork of a tree. My father shinned up the tree and with a stick and considerable stretching managed to dislodge it. The next day he happened to be near the same tree and could look the situation over by the light of day. The tree stood on the cliff edge that fell away to a stony ravine a hundred feet below. The tree was a dead gnarled oak with a list toward the ravine.

"Had I fallen," my father said, "they would have needed a shovel to pick me up."

\* \* \*

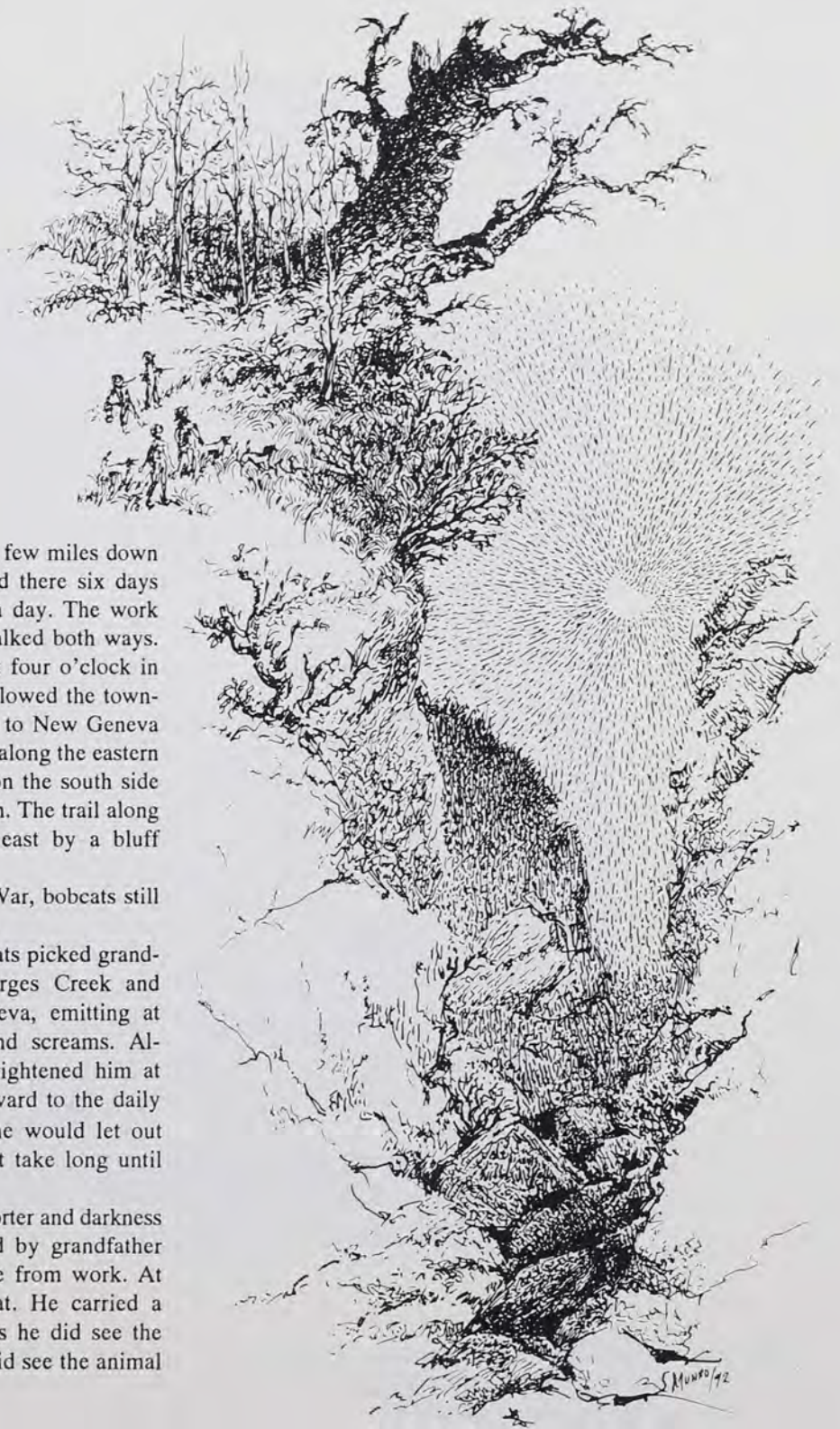
Eggs were one of the major products of the Dick Stevenson farm. It was the job of the sons to carry these to market at the Davenport general store in New Geneva. There, the amount the merchant allowed for the eggs was chalked up as a figure against which the Stevensons could trade for needed groceries.

"When but a lad of six or seven," Charles said, "my father and Uncle Ellis, who was a year older, delivered the eggs once a week or so. A large wooden tub was filled with quite a few dozen. The boys carried this between them. Each also carried a metal pail filled with eggs in the other hand, the buckets acting as a balance to the tub.

"It now seems impossible to me that two small boys could carry that much. But they did it. They would alternately carry and rest and carry and rest until they reached the New Geneva store."

\* \* \*

While Richard Gregg Stevenson lived on the Georges Creek farm (he later moved to a larger one on the hillside above Nilan), he had an off-the-farm job as a laborer



helping build a Monongahela River dam a few miles down the stream from New Geneva. He worked there six days a week, ten hours a day, for fifty cents a day. The work site was nine miles from home and he walked both ways.

"He began his day by leaving home at four o'clock in the morning," Charles said. "His route followed the township road down the Georges Creek valley to New Geneva and then along a little-used trail northward along the eastern edge of the river. The creek is bordered on the south side by a wooded cliff several hundred feet high. The trail along the river likewise was bordered to the east by a bluff equally as high.

"In those days, shortly after the Civil War, bobcats still abounded in southwestern Pennsylvania.

"Morning after morning, one of these cats picked grandfather up on the opposite side of Georges Creek and followed him all the way to New Geneva, emitting at regular intervals blood-curdling wails and screams. Although he said the screams somewhat frightened him at first, grandfather soon began looking forward to the daily game with the cat. If it did not show, he would let out a few imitation cat screams. It would not take long until the cat responded.

"As autumn arrived and days became shorter and darkness came sooner, the same game was played by grandfather and the cat both going and coming home from work. At no time did grandfather ever see the cat. He carried a kerosene lantern and on several occasions he did see the reflection of the cat's eyes. But he never did see the animal itself."

\* \* \*

While Dick Stevenson's sons were growing up along Georges Creek, a natural gas seepage somewhere in the vicinity provided them considerable entertainment. Charles was not sure whether the seepage had occurred from drilling years before, or whether it came naturally from a fissure in the earth.

But anyway, the natural gas provided the fuel for a ready-made camp fire. Around it youngsters of the area gathered on many a night in the early 1880s. "As my

grandfather said," Charles related, "the boys sometimes just horsed around. But they also used the gas for cooking."

Sometimes they boiled eggs. They also boiled corn, gathered either from a sweet-corn patch or the field. And once in a while one of the boys became ambitious and prepared and mud-baked a chicken for all to enjoy.

In later years, several natural gas wells were drilled in the area.

# THE PENNSYLVANIA-GERMAN SCHRANK

by Henry J. Kauffman



*Walnut and poplar schrank (ninety-two inches high, eighty-three inches wide) with arch-top panels, brass Chippendale hardware, and O-G feet. (Private collection)*

The first schranks were probably designed by cabinet-makers in Nuremberg in the late Middle Ages and were used for the storage of clothing. Large, because the rooms they were used in were large, they were used instead of closets since there were no closets in early German houses. For the same reason, their first use in America was similar to their use in Germany. As a matter of fact, the installation of closets in bedrooms is a reasonably recent innovation. I was born in a house that had no closets, and lived in another nineteenth-century house that also lacked closets.

Surprisingly, perhaps, a large number of schranks have survived, despite the fact that they have virtually no practical

use today. (I do not know of one instance in which a schrank is serving its original purpose, although I do know of adaptive uses—for example, the storage of books.)

Most of the museums and historic sites in southeastern Pennsylvania have one, and one museum director has two, while the writer owns three. Judging from today's numbers, one must conclude that hundreds of schranks were in use in the late eighteenth century. And, it should be noted, virtually all of the extant examples are thought to have been made by Pennsylvania cabinetmakers. The makers of a few have been identified, but no biographical data is known about them. Today, historians think that most of





An "exploded" schrank, showing the various parts. (Courtesy of Vernon Gunnion)

the surviving examples were made in Lancaster County, a conclusion probably based on the fact that many have turned up there.

The first impression one gets of schranks is that they are *big*. One surviving schrank is 108 inches high, and the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, has one that is eighty-eight inches wide. This accounts for the fact that few people have them today. Most schranks are eight feet high (give or take a few inches), and, used in modern houses with eight-foot ceilings, look squashed and unattractive. There is great demand for schranks that are about six feet high, so some have been shortened by removing

the feet. When one of these comes up for auction, the question of the lack of original feet is raised immediately. Often evidence of original feet is missing.

A casual examination gives no hint of a rare feature of these very large pieces of furniture: they can be dismantled into many parts without the use of tools. If it becomes necessary to move them, top, base, back, ends, and doors can be easily separated. In a 1982 display of schranks at the Heritage Center of Lancaster County, one was "exploded": the separate parts were suspended in proximity to each other so their mobility could be clearly seen.

The facades of Pennsylvania-German schranks show them divided vertically by two doors, and many of these doors are mounted on iron "rat-tail" hinges. Inside, one half originally had shelves for the storage of small articles of clothing, while the other half had pegs on which garments were hung; few extant examples retain their original pegs today. Most also have three to five drawers in the base section. Although these are generally not very notable, some do have lavish displays of Chippendale brasses and escutcheons. Polished, these give a dramatic touch to the appearance of the schrank.

Most surviving schranks are made of walnut and there are good reasons for that. In the first place, unlimited amounts of walnut wood were available. In the second place, walnut has many desirable qualities which made it very acceptable to cabinetmakers, who used it to make a variety of furniture products. Hard (it will withstand ordinary and extraordinary usage), it also has a very attractive dark brown color which slowly, over the years, acquires a red tinge that makes it even more appealing.

Although there are beds, desks, highboys, tables, and tall-clock cases made of curly maple wood, I have never heard of a schrank made from it. I do know of one made from pear wood, and also of a few made of poplar and a few of pine. Poplar, whose hardness lies between walnut and pine, also has many desirable woodworking qualities and a great many decorated blanket chests were made from it.



*A large schrank in Easton, Pa., with a brilliant display of brass Chippendale hardware. (Private collection)*

*German-type walnut and poplar schrank made by Johannes Krause in the collection of Old Salem in North Carolina. The drawers which extend the full width of the piece are a unique feature. (Courtesy of Old Salem, Inc.)*



Even though it is most unusual for an antiques dealer to tell a customer about objects he has seen, one dealer who thoroughly dislikes pine told me of a schrank made from it that he had seen in a farmhouse in a section of Lancaster County known as "Little Pittsburgh." I found the piece, its surface dusty and dirty, in a dark bedroom on the second floor of the house. Fortunately, I had a flashlight, and after rubbing the dirt off a corner with my thumb I discovered it was painted an old "Dutch" blue. I bought it (many hands were required to get it out the second-story window), and while carefully cleaning it to preserve the original blue paint, discovered the doors were painted with a very attractive artificial-grain design. Six feet tall, this schrank has no drawers, and stands on turned legs which definitely identify it as the product of a local nineteenth-century craftsman.

It should be noted that painted schranks made in Pennsylvania are extremely rare. A large one is on display in the Ford Museum. The background on it is marbelized, and scenes from nature are painted on the raised panels of the doors. Its origin is said to be Lancaster County, although there is no documentation of that hypothesis. But if few Pennsylvania-German schranks are painted, and if a few others are completely undecorated, still others have unique decorations.

For example, one of the schranks exhibited at the Heritage Center of Lancaster County in 1982 has chip carvings in the corners of the doors, and wood inlays in the door panels: In the upper left-hand panel is "Abram Reist," and in the lower left-hand panel is "Anno 1775"; in the upper



*Schrack, painted "Dutch" blue, found by the author in a house in the "Little Pittsburgh" area of Lancaster County, Pa.*



*Dated 1775, this attractive schrank with its sulfur-inlay designs, brass hardware, and O-G feet was probably made in Lancaster County, Pa. (Courtesy of the Heritage Center of Lancaster County)*



*Pennsylvania-German schrank dated 1779 and attributed to Peter Hull III and Christian Huber. Of black walnut, poplar, pine, and oak, it is eighty-eight inches high, seventy-eight inches wide, and twenty-seven and a half inches deep. Detail pictures show the unique sulfur inlays and intricate cornice moldings. (Courtesy, Philadelphia Museum of Art)*

right-hand panel is "Elizabeth Reist," with "dem 8 Mertz" in the panel below. Moreover, in comparison to the decorations on many of the schranks shown, these are modest. Most of the examples have typical Chippendale-style cabinets and impressive cornices; at least two have broken pediments.

While most of the wood inlays in the schranks which have them are skillfully done, the really exciting inlays are those of sulfur. Twenty-five years ago the material inlaid was described as "wax," and without intensive research this conclusion seemed to be a logical one. However, after an old note was found which said that sulfur was the inlay material, museums began analyzing the substance in the grooves and confirmed that that was indeed the case.

Since many of the designs for inlays were thin and complex, they were very difficult to execute with small

pieces of wood, and using sulfur no doubt saved a great deal of time. The design was simply cut into the wood and molten sulfur poured into the channels. To complete the job, the surface needed only to be polished after the sulfur had cooled and hardened.

The Huber schrank, owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is a unique example of sulfur-inlay furniture. It has an elaborate array of vines around the edges of its doors, crowns with birds perched on them on the doors' upper panels, and swirling swastikas on the lower panels. The sides are also paneled, but they do not have inlaid designs. This piece of furniture may not be as great as a block-front secretary from Newport, but it is certainly one of the finest examples of American furniture extant.

\* \* \*

Made in Birdsmountain, Franconia, this German schrank for sale in America today is similar to Pennsylvania-German schrank only in size and shape. (Courtesy of Cupboards and Roses)



Examining the photographs of about one hundred European schrank in Claudia List's *Alte Bauernschränke: Deutschland, Osterreich, Schweiz* (Keyser, 1981), leads to the conclusion that there are some differences between them and the schrank made in America. Most of the German, Austrian, and Swiss schrank illustrated were made in the last half of the eighteenth century, as were those made in Pennsylvania, yet they do not appear to be as large as those made here. (This may be a mistaken impression, for the sizes of the European schrank are not given.) There is no evidence, either, that they can be as easily dismantled as their New World counterparts.

Moreover, while in both cases the bodies of the schrank are predominately vertical, of the one hundred European examples examined, approximately twenty-five percent have only one door. In contrast, I know of no Pennsylvania-German schrank with only one door. Also, many of the Central European schrank do not have feet, and, on some that do, the feet are not decorative but are merely short and square, serving only to lift the piece off the floor. Some do have turned feet, and one has "runners," a simple and attractive way to elevate a piece of furniture and a method often used on Pennsylvania-German blanket chests. A sizeable number of Old World schrank also have drawers in their bases, many operated by pulling knobs.

The most striking difference between European and American schrank however, is in the matter of decoration. Many of the former have intricate arrangements of moldings on the face of the doors, while others are painted, some with human figures on the door panels. On many pieces a combination of these two types of decoration are used. As already mentioned, painted Pennsylvania-German schrank are rare.

Although one might think there would be only a small demand for these European schrank in America today, one New England antiques dealer specializes in them. I myself have a schrank purchased from an antiques dealer in Washington, D.C. He said it was brought to America by an employee of our embassy in Switzerland, so presumably it was made there. At least it has features not commonly found on German or Pennsylvania-German schrank.

Most striking is its height of less than six feet. This allows it to fit nicely in a room with an eight-foot ceiling, and even allows room to display two decorative pewter pieces on top. It lacks the protruding cornice found on most schrank, and the molding on its base is equally unobtrusive; it never had feet. The facade is divided vertically into



Compared with Pennsylvania-German schrank, this mid-19th-century German schrank is very elegantly decorated. (Private owner)

*Less than six feet high, this softwood schrank was made in Switzerland in 1779. The decoration is intact; it never had feet. (Kauffman collection)*

equal parts with separate doors. These doors—about one and a quarter inches thick—are attached to long strap hinges (each fastened with very short nails) similar to those found on Pennsylvania-German blanket chests. Two splines have been inserted on the inner surface of the doors to help keep them from warping. This has produced very satisfactory results. The original iron box lock, key, and escutcheons survive; the latter are made of sheet tin and embossed. In Pennsylvania the escutcheons would have been made of brass or iron and pierced.

The door panels on this Swiss schrank have been very cleverly carved from a solid slab of wood; the three small horizontal parts are attached by wooden pegs. The body has been painted a dark blue, while the door panels are white, and the decorative motifs red and green. "1779" appears on the board above the doors. This schrank can be easily moved even though it cannot be dismantled like its Pennsylvania-German counterparts.

\* \* \*

Fifty years ago it was very difficult to get a starting bid on a schrank at a public auction; no one wanted one and they seemed worthless. When I found a schrank at an antiques shop in Lititz, Pennsylvania, then, the dealer at first refused to put a price on it, for he planned to cut it up to repair antique walnut furniture. After considerable discussion he quoted a price of forty dollars, and I bought it and stored it in a barn because it was too big to get into my house. Soon a dealer came along who wanted it and I swapped it for a copy of the *Martyr's Mirror*, printed and sold at the Ephrata Cloister starting in 1748, and probably the greatest book published in Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century.

But times have changed, and just as that book, with its covers of thin oak boards covered with leather and with its pieces of brass to protect the corners, is worth much more than forty dollars today, so too have the prices of schranks escalated. The going price for a good schrank today is at least \$20,000, and some bring a great deal more. Recently, a schrank which had stood in the second-floor hallway of a Bucks County farmhouse since it was built in 1793 sold at auction for \$132,000.

\* \* \*

In concluding this short study of schranks, some comment should be made concerning the word itself. Obviously German, as any quick check of a German dictionary will confirm, it has probably been applied to this type of furniture for centuries past. An interesting observation can

*A German schrank made of pear wood, ca. 1650; it was sold at auction in America and shipped back to Germany. (Courtesy of Litchfield Auction Gallery)*



be made about contemporary museum officials who bypass its use in favor of words such as “clothes press” and “wardrobe.” This is obviously an attempt to avoid confronting the public with a strange word, but many may not be any more familiar with the term “clothes press.” They may be told presses were used for the storage of clothing, but be completely uninformed about the style and general physical appearance of a clothes press. Even calling a schrank a wardrobe produces a dilemma, for most people have probably never seen an eighteenth-century English wardrobe; as a matter of fact, I myself never have.

Even though the use of alternate words will no doubt continue indefinitely, calling a schrank by another name simply denies the fact that a German material culture existed in Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century. In this way, the furnishings of Pennsylvania-German houses are completely ignored.



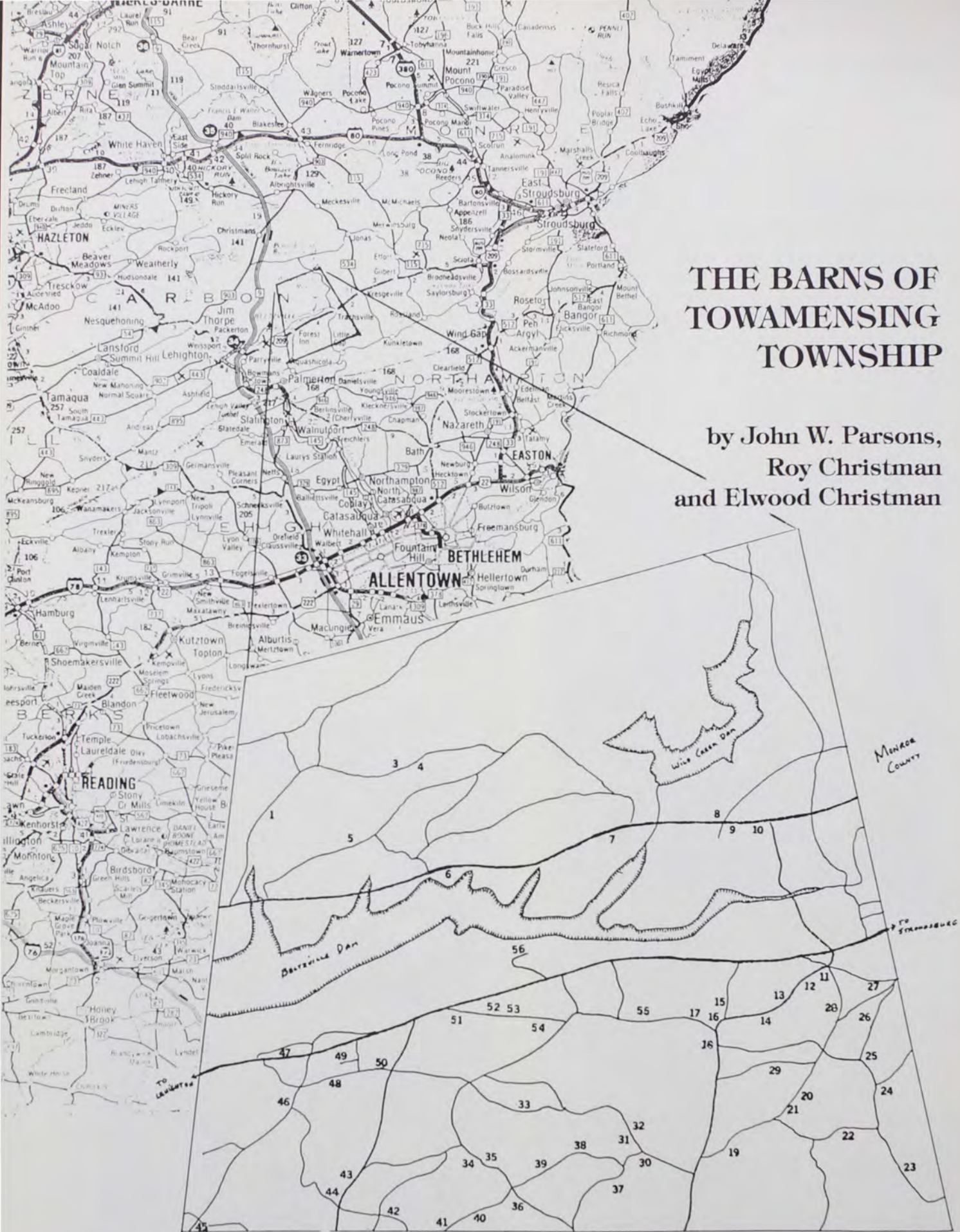
*Originally painted red but now painted blue, this ninety-three-inch-high softwood schrank (ca. 1770) was bought at a household auction in Lancaster County fifteen years ago. (Courtesy of the Farm Museum of Landis Valley)*



*Another Lancaster County schrank (ca. 1740) with unusually large cornice moldings. The shape of the panels and the polychromed carvings are unique; it appears never to have had feet. (Courtesy of the Heritage Center of Lancaster County)*

*One hundred and eight inches high and seventy-six inches wide, this Lancaster or Chester County schrank has a very unusual broken-arch crown molding and a rare, twisted column in the center. There were iron pulls similar to these on the Old Valley Inn near York, Pa. Doubtless pre-Revolutionary. (Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Flanders Smith)*





# THE BARNs OF TOWAMENSING TOWNSHIP

by John W. Parsons,  
Roy Christman  
and Elwood Christman





*Koenig barn*

The defining feature of the Pennsylvania rural landscape, the barn, is in trouble. In fact, if Pennsylvania barns were animals, they would probably be on the list of endangered species. Malls and subdivisions spring up in former corn fields. In areas where agriculture does remain important, changes in farm technology have made old wooden barns obsolete. The high cost of barn maintenance often puts preservation beyond the means of well-intentioned owners who do want to keep their barns. Natural forces—fire, wind, water, insects—take their toll.

Towamensing Township, located in Carbon County in eastern Pennsylvania, is home to fifty-six barns. Farming was the major economic activity in the township until the 1950s. The typical township farmer was Pennsylvania Dutch; typical farm products included vegetables, wheat, oats, rye, corn, hay, potatoes, apples, hogs, and chickens. Farms were family-owned and operated.

The Wild Creek Reservoir, completed in 1940 to serve as the water supply for the city of Bethlehem, took a few farms but did not alter the basic economy of the township. A larger reservoir, the Beltzville Dam, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project, was completed in 1969. The Corps not only took the area below the water line, but also acquired a large amount of land surrounding the dam. The dam and surrounding area are now Beltzville State Park, part of the Pennsylvania park system.

Completion of the dam project wiped out approximately fifteen farms and thirteen barns. Most of the destroyed barns had been built prior to 1900. The major impact of the project, however, resulted not from the elimination of



*Rhodes barn, converted to a house.*



*Otto barn*

farms, but rather from the changes in the economy of the township put in motion by the action of the Army Corps.

Farm land overlooking the lake became a valuable commodity. Surveyor stakes replaced wheat and corn, and farm sales became a common occurrence. Tourists from New Jersey and New York saw the township as a desirable location for retirement. The Northeast extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the completion of interstate highways allowed people to live in the township and work in distant urban centers.

#### **PRESERVING THE REMAINING BARNs**

As farms are sold or converted to non-farm use, what is happening to the barns? How do the non-farming residents regard barns on their newly acquired property? Does a bank barn with a plank thresh floor still have uses as we approach the twenty-first century? Do township residents appreciate the barns as a resource worth preserving? Can the barns be preserved?

We set out to answer these questions in a township that is typical of many areas in Pennsylvania and other northeastern states. Towamensing is close enough to its rural past to retain many of its barns, but it is also under heavy development pressure. Some farming, especially part-time farming, continues in Towamensing today, but the downward trend in farming activity will probably continue. We are aware that in this respect, Towamensing is probably typical of hundreds of townships across the state and nation.



*Graver barn*



*Christman barn*



*Stout barn*



*Norm Strohl barn*

### THE STUDY

We visited every barn in the township. In most cases we interviewed the barn owners. We were often invited to examine the interior of the barns. We supplemented our interviews and observations with information from a number of older township residents.

The map shows where the barns are located. We have indicated the location of every barn except the one which has been converted to a house in order to protect the privacy of the owners.

### THE BARN USED AS A BARN

Approximately half of the barns in Towamensing are still used for agricultural purposes. The uses are not those envisioned by the builders of bank barns in the nineteenth century—no farmer in the township threshes on the thresh floor, blows straw into the mow, or puts hay away loose. The horses now living in the barns are usually riding horses, not work horses. Nevertheless, we must note that the barns are utilized to store hay and straw, shelter animals, and keep farm equipment out of the rain.

Since we previously stated that agriculture has declined in the township, this continuing agricultural use must be explained. While few full-time farmers remain in the township, we found part-time farmers who supplement their income with wage labor, retired farmers who continue to farm on a reduced level, and hobby farmers.

The term “agricultural use” also needs explanation. Only six township barns are located on farms where the farmer’s



*Meinhardt barn*



*Charles Beer barn*

main source of income is derived from agriculture. Dairy farming is non-existent; there is only one milk cow in the entire township. One barn houses a goat (Harvey Strohl), one shelters steers (Clair George), and four contain horses. Of these last four, one is used for boarding horses (Charles Beer), one houses horses for guest rides (Don Laine), and two house personal riding horses (Berger and Everett).

It must also be noted that the remaining agriculture is in transition. Christmas tree farms have replaced corn and potatoes on three township farms, and two farms have active "pick your own" strawberry operations. Nevertheless, on a farm of any size and economic level, a large available building will be used. In fact, two of the township's barns on inactive farms are currently rented for storage purposes by nearby farmers. Farm activity is almost a guarantee that a barn will be preserved, although it is not a guarantee of good maintenance and repair. The problem for preservationists is that farming in Towamensing is sure to experience further decline. Not one of the full-time farmers is under forty-five years old.

**A SUBSET: THE BARN AS CHICKEN COOP**

In the 1940s and 1950s a number of bank barns were converted to chicken raising, either for layers or broilers. Chicken farming on this scale is no longer economically viable, and two of these converted barns stand empty (Otto and Halada), one is used for storage (Christman), one is used as a garage (Ruch), and one has been partially reconverted for horses (Berger).



*Cohen barn*



*Harvey Strohl barn*



*Sei Pike barn*

### THE BARN USED AS STORAGE SHED OR GARAGE

A number of barns are used much like suburbanites use their garages—to store cars, trucks, lawn mowers, tools, lumber, and everything else that does not fit in the house. Farmers generally kept such items in a shed; the barn was for hay, straw, and cattle or horses. In eastern Pennsylvania the distinction between “barn” and “shed” is often unclear, but relates to size, construction techniques, and purpose. Sheds are usually smaller than barns, simple in construction, lack a bank (ramp) to the second story, and used for storage rather than to house animals.

Many of the new residents who bought up the old farms find themselves owning a very large empty building. It is a natural for storage. Retired farmers also will need to keep a tractor to plow the truckpatch, a plow, a harrow, a mower, an old pickup, and about a thousand other items, from sleds for the grandchildren to onions drying on the rafters.

Three of the barns are used specifically as garages (Ralph Zigenfuss, Ruch, and Earl Strohl), and this use will probably increase.

### THE BARN AS HOUSE

There is only one in the township. The conversion work was done by a local carpenter in the 1950s. He retained the barn “feel”; the built-in ladder from the thresh floor, the beams, and the thresh floor itself are clearly visible. The overhang at the back is now a screened porch overlooking a yard and pond.



*Anthony barn*



*Kuehner barn*



*Borger barn*

Barn to house conversion is largely a novelty. One problem is perception. New home buyers think in terms of new homes, not barn conversions. If they do think barn, they may still be dissuaded by the cost of converting a traditional bank barn on a stone foundation to an insulated house with all of the modern conveniences.

#### **THE BARN UNUSED**

This category could be subdivided. A number of unused barns are pleasing to their owners, some of whom recently moved into or vacation in the township. The Dayton, Touger, Cohen and Bartholomew barn owners *like* their barns. Michael Bartholomew, a former member of the township planning commission, liked his so much that he had it rehabilitated. Beltzville State Park superintendent David Kemmerer has preserved the Bisbing barn, now located on state park land. These barns, although unused, will be maintained as the treasured remnants of an agricultural past.

The second category of unused barn is in danger of destruction. These are owned by non-farmers who see them as eyesores or liabilities. The Johnson barn, across the road from the Beltzville State Park, was torn down by a developer. The worst offender in this regard was the Army Corps of Engineers, which needlessly caused the destruction of a number of nineteenth-century bank barns when the Beltzville Dam property was acquired.



*Halada barn*



*Don Laine barn*



*Eugene Strohl barn*



*Lloyd Ziegenfus barn*



*Alton Smith barn*

#### **THE BARN AS RUIN**

An unused and unappreciated barn will not be repaired. Once the roof has holes, the barn deteriorates rapidly. At some point the barn will not be worth saving even by a new owner who believes in barn preservation. The siding is stripped off, the floor caves in, the barn collapses.

The township has two such relics, the Tom Beer and "Piro" Hahn barns. The Smith/Strohl barn has broken beams, and the Copeland barn is missing its eastern side. If present conditions in the township continue, we will probably see more barns entering this category.

#### **THE BARN AS MEMORY**

The township government has made some efforts to save its agricultural heritage. A number of farmers and land-owners signed up to join an "agricultural security zone" which protects them from suits against farm-related activity and allows them to apply to the state program to sell development rights. The township has also put in some three-acre-minimum lot restrictions in an effort to retain open space although the argument is made that three-acre-lot requirements actually eat up farmland even faster.

One hope for agriculture to survive in the township would be to have an increase in specialty crops, "U-Pickum" farms, and farm-to-market farmers. This has been occurring in the township, but at a slow rate.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has undertaken a program called "Barn Again" to assist barn preservation efforts, but most of the projects relate to agricul-



*Beers/Touger barn*



*Naomi George barn*



*Tom Beer barn*



*Eckhart barn*



*Adam George barn*

tural use. More conversions from barns to houses are possible, but preservationists argue among themselves if such conversions really constitute preservation.

The best hope for barn preservation in Towamensing or anywhere else is to encourage an appreciation for barns as barns. We must foster the attitude which now moves people to buy decrepit Victorians in San Francisco or antebellum mansions in Charleston and lovingly restore them to their original glory. We need people to recognize the characteristics of a bank barn, the mortise and tenon construction, the chestnut beams, the smell of drying hay on a hot June day. We need people who like barns.

**Appendix**

| #  | name of barn       | agri.garage | unused | house | ruin | remarks                         |
|----|--------------------|-------------|--------|-------|------|---------------------------------|
| 1  | Koenig             | x           |        |       |      | retired farmer                  |
| 2  | Rhodes             |             |        |       | x    |                                 |
| 3  | Otto               |             | x      |       |      | chicken house conversion        |
| 4  | Graver             | x           |        |       |      | date in foundation              |
| 5  | Christman          | x           |        |       |      | chicken house conversion        |
| 6  | Stout              | x           |        |       |      | rented by Game Commission       |
| 7  | Strohl/<br>Gibbons |             | x      |       |      | new barn built with old timbers |
| 8  | Meinhardt          |             | x      |       |      | smallest barn in township       |
| 9  | Heydt/Boyd         | x           |        |       |      | hobby farmer                    |
| 10 | Neal Strohl        | x           |        |       |      |                                 |
| 11 | Charles Beer       | x           |        |       |      | horses boarded                  |
| 12 | Clint Berger       | x           |        |       |      | to chickens, back to horses     |



*Greene/Green barn*





*Bieling barn*



*Diehl barn*



*Reichstadter barn*



*Everett barn*

**Appendix**

| #  | name of barn     | agri.garage | unused house | ruin | remarks                          |
|----|------------------|-------------|--------------|------|----------------------------------|
| 13 | Cohen            |             | x            |      |                                  |
| 14 | Harvey Strohl    | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 15 | Sei Pike         | x           |              |      | hay storage                      |
| 16 | Preston Beers    | x           |              |      | retired farmer                   |
| 17 | Ralph Zigenfuss  | x           |              |      | new siding on barn               |
| 18 | "Piro" Hahn      |             |              | x    | may have already collapsed       |
| 19 | Anthony          | x           |              |      | oldest barn in township          |
| 20 | Kuehner          | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 21 | Borger           |             | x            |      | interesting door runners         |
| 22 | Lewis George     | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 23 | Halada           |             | x            |      | chicken house conversion         |
| 24 | Buck/George      | x           |              |      | riding horses                    |
| 25 | Smith/Strohl     |             | x            |      | almost a ruin                    |
| 26 | Lloyd Ziegenfus  | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 27 | Berger/Dayton    |             | x            |      | being renovated                  |
| 28 | Alton Smith      | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 29 | Beers/Touger     |             | x            |      | new owner likes the barn         |
| 30 | Burton George    |             | x            |      |                                  |
| 31 | Eckhart          | x           |              |      | retired farmer                   |
| 32 | Snyder           | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 33 | Buck/Bartholomew | x           |              |      | extensive repairs completed      |
| 34 | William Hahn     | x           |              |      | Christmas tree grower            |
| 35 | Franklin Hahn    |             | x            |      |                                  |
| 36 | Clark George     | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 37 | Tom Beer         |             |              | x    | only the frame remains           |
| 38 | Buck             | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 39 | Adam George      | x           |              |      | retired farmer, farmed by sons   |
| 40 | Albert Brown     | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 41 | Clifford Green   | x           |              |      | two thresh floors                |
| 42 | Greene/Green     | x           |              |      | in spite of name, painted red    |
| 43 | William Strohl   | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 44 | Elmer Brown      |             | x            |      | used briefly as house after fire |
| 45 | Bieling          |             | x            |      |                                  |
| 46 | Kresge/Turner    | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 47 | Diehl            | x           |              |      | only "catalog" barn in twp.      |
| 48 | Stemler          | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 49 | Ruch             | x           |              |      | first to chickens, now cars      |
| 50 | Reichstadter     |             | x            |      | second last barn built in twp.   |
| 51 | Clair George     | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 52 | Charles Berger   |             |              | x    | one side is collapsed            |
| 53 | Herbert Beers    | x           |              |      |                                  |
| 54 | Earl Beers       | x           |              |      | Christmas tree farm              |
| 55 | Everett          | x           |              |      | newest barn in twp.; horses      |
| 56 | Bisbing          | x           |              |      | part of Beltsville state park    |

## A Review of Robert F. Ensminger's *THE PENNSYLVANIA BARN* by Greg Huber



*Class I log Sweitzer Pennsylvania barn (ca. 1790-1810) in Greenwich Township, Berks County, Pa., with asymmetrical gable-end silhouette, unsupported forebay, double-log-crib mows separated by a central threshing floor on upper level, and stables below.*

Call it good fortune, serendipity, or perhaps even fate that a camera recorded the scene when Robert Ensminger's wife's grandfather and some of his friends stood beneath the forebay of a barn in Switzerland near the turn of the last century. Looking at the picture, Ensminger immediately knew that this barn was similar to many barns found in his native southeastern Pennsylvania, four thousand miles away. Seeing this old photograph stimulated a searching curiosity, and ultimately resulted in this trailblazing book—*The Pennsylvania Barn: Its Origin, Evolution, and Distribution in North America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. 238 pp. \$39.95).

The Pennsylvania barn is specifically defined as a two-story, multi-purpose, bank barn with a forebay or overshoot. Many North American barns are banked on one side at the upper level to permit the entry and exit of hay wagons, but the unique feature of Pennsylvania barns is the forebay—a second floor extension over the front stable wall; without exception, all Pennsylvania barns have a forebay. Constructed of log, stone, or frame (or any combination of the three), the barn housed livestock on the bottom level, while the top level was used for threshing grain and for storing grain, hay, and straw.

A major example of North American vernacular architecture, the Pennsylvania barn has long been the object of special recognition and reporting. In the 18th century, travelers to the eastern part of the state reported seeing some barns more than one hundred feet long; confirmation of the fact that agriculture was king in the area then. One observer took note of the “overhanging” gallery, or fore-

bay, on a Pennsylvania barn as early as 1806. Another, in 1803-04, described barns near Philadelphia, and included plans for two of them; one plan shows a post-supported forebay. In the August, 1848, issue of the *Pennsylvania Cultivator*, one perhaps overenthusiastic writer said that “properly speaking, in other states they have no barns—they don't know what a real good barn is. . . . A journey through New York and New England will confirm our remarks. They will have to come into Pennsylvania.”

There have long been two schools of thought concerning the origins of the Pennsylvania barn. Scholars such as Marion Learned (writing in 1915) and Thomas Wertenbaker (writing in 1938) claimed that certain Swiss-Germanic house types were the Pennsylvania barn's probable prototype. Both, though, denied a direct transfer of the forebay from Europe to North America; they implied there had been some modification. Others, however, denied that any direct precedent existed in Europe; they claimed that the Pennsylvania barn evolved through a series of changes to arrive at its fully developed form in the New World. Prominent among these scholars are Charles Dornbusch and John Heyl (*Pennsylvania German Barns*, 1958), and folklife scholar Henry Glassie.

Ensminger can recall hearing general statements made about forebay barns as early as 1958, when he was enrolled in a settlement geography course at Rutgers University. Subsequent study convinced him, however, that no true systematic and extensive research had been done on the subject. To remedy this, he sifted through hundreds of historical references to compile data, and made trips to



*Class II closed forebay standard Pennsylvania barn (ca. 1820) in Harmony Township, Warren County, N.J. has a symmetrical gable-end silhouette, and a fully supported forebay with a pier corner or alcove, a very distinctive feature.*



*Class III vertical extension ("double-decker") Pennsylvania barn (1816) in Warren County, N.J. has a symmetrical gable-end silhouette, and a fully supported forebay. The top level has a wide central threshing floor; the middle level a granary surrounded by hay mows, with the bottom level used for stabling livestock.*

Europe in 1975 and 1978 to see for himself if a Pennsylvania barn prototype exists. Initially he was skeptical about making such a find, and actually wanted to believe that the Pennsylvania barn was an expression of his ancestors' creative endeavors.

He was not disappointed then, when he found no forebay barns in the Rhineland-Palatinate area of Germany, the region from which many Pennsylvania Germans had emigrated. Later, though, he saw hundreds of precursor-type forebay barns in central Switzerland. But he found that it was the long, forebay bank barns of Prätigau, in eastern Switzerland, that most closely resemble the early two-level, log-double-crib forebay bank barns (called "Sweitzer" barns) of southeastern Pennsylvania. It was this discovery which "forced [him] to accept the strong possibility of a Swiss prototype for the Pennsylvania barn." Coincidentally, Terry Jordan, another American geographer doing research in Europe in 1978, came to virtually identical conclusions.

It was Jordan, too, who cited (in a 1987 article published in *Pennsylvania Folklife*) studies by Swiss scholars which document the presence of forebay bank barns in areas along the upper Rhine River, and in the Schanfigg district of eastern Switzerland that Ensminger had not visited. Responding to this, Ensminger returned to Switzerland in 1988 to reexamine his original premise that there are direct prototypes for the Pennsylvania barn. On this trip he visited forebay barns in twelve distinct areas; nine in Switzerland and three in extreme western Austria. The positions and sizes of the forebays vary from area to area: some appear on the eave side of the building, others on the gable side. There are even two areas (the Bregenzer Valley in Austria and Toggenburg in Switzerland) that have ground (one-level) barns with forebays. Numerous photographs clearly show every type, and two maps illustrate the areas in which they are found and their general distribution.

Significantly, Ensminger's European research translated into more than just the important discovery of the con-

nection between the Swiss forebay barn and the early log Sweitzer barn of southeastern Pennsylvania. In the most complex section of the book, "The Walser-Romansch Connection," he traces the development of the forebay (*Vorschub* or *Vürschutz*) on the bank barns of Prätigau.

The story begins with the Walsers, a Germanic people who had migrated south into Switzerland's Canton Wallis by the end of the 12th century. They continued migrating, and became the greatest colonizers of the high Alpine valleys, displacing the indigenous Romansch peoples as they moved into those areas. As Ensminger notes, their "migration pattern correlates very closely with the southern and eastern portion of the Swiss forebay-barn region!" (A map of their movements is provided.)

In the 14th century the Walsers moved into the Prätigau and Schanfigg valleys, and it was in these valleys that the forebay bank barn reached its full development. The Walsers' contribution to the process was the basic high Alpine barn with a shallow gable forebay. The Romansch elements were the Chischner and the Talina. The Chischner was a free-standing scaffold-like rack erected in the field and used to dry grain; when it was attached to the upper level of a barn it was called a Talina. This Talina extended several feet beyond the upper gable wall, creating a walkway and protecting the front stable wall below. "In Prätigau and the Schanfigg district, the Talina became a closed multiple-purpose storage area separate from the haymows, where sheaves and bags of grain, as well as tools and firewood, could be kept. . . . The attachment of such forebays to the eave side of a log-double-crib bank barn produced the classic Prätigau barn."

The foregoing explanation probably constitutes Ensminger's most important contribution to our understanding of how the Pennsylvania barn came to be, for it was the classic Prätigau form which was transported to America and which first appeared in Pennsylvania as the log Sweitzer barn. Before long, however, there began to

be "significant variations in the details of the design and construction of Pennsylvania barns." These were due to a changing farm economy, and to the barn's diffusion into new areas with different agricultural practices.

Because of these variations, Charles Dornbusch was the first to classify Pennsylvania barns according to certain criteria (his system, published in 1958, appears in Appendix B). But Dornbusch's classifications covered only barn types found in southeastern Pennsylvania (and not even all of them), so Ensminger developed his own system. It covers all Pennsylvania barns no matter where they are found, and he arrived at it by "examining in detail the differences in the specifications of the forebay and the process of its integration into the barn frame." After doing so he listed eighteen types or subtypes in three major classes: Class I—The Sweitzer Pennsylvania Barn (1730-1850) with Types A, B, and C; Class II—The Standard Pennsylvania Barn (1790-1890) with Types A through F, with the latter having four subtypes; Class III—The Extended Pennsylvania Barn (1790-1920) with Types A through D, with Types A and C each having two subtypes. Under each class designation Ensminger includes general specifications, and under each type the locations and general descriptions of various examples.

The Sweitzer barn almost always had a frame rather than a log forebay, and this forebay did not have support posts. Extending unbroken over the forebay, the front slope of the roof is longer than the back slope, resulting in an asymmetrical gable end—an identifying feature of this class of barn. The log Sweitzer (Type A), "Pennsylvania's first forebay bank barn," had "two log-crib haymows separated by a central threshing floor." On the classic Sweitzer (Type B) these cribs were replaced by masonry walls and hewn interior bents—"heavy timber section[s] of the barn framework." The transition Sweitzer (Type C; so-called because early ones may have been transitional to the closed-forebay standard barn) unlike the first two Sweitzers, did have a supported forebay.

Spread over a large area by the pioneer movement westward, there are more standard Pennsylvania barns than any other kind. Here we see "the use of symmetrical bents that [unlike the Sweitzer] include the forebay within the main barn frame. . . . This permits the roof ridge to be centered over the whole barn structure. The obvious result is to produce a *symmetrical* gable end for the upper, framed part of the barn," a distinctive characteristic of this class. Since he was unable to find an exact European prototype for it, Ensminger concludes that the standard Pennsylvania barn is a true American innovation. There are six main types in this class, with the first three defined by the kind of forebay (closed, open, posted); the fourth being those with multiple overhangs; the fifth those with basement drive-throughs; and the sixth having four subtypes that are special forms of the standard Pennsylvania barn.

During the nineteenth century agriculture flourished, and to accommodate increased production farmers needed larger barns. The four types and four subtypes of Class III, the

extended Pennsylvania barn, are categorized then by the way in which they were enlarged: extended supported-forebay (Type A); front shed (Type B); rear extension (Type C); and vertical extension ("double decker," Type D).

Ensminger's classification system is well-organized, making it easy to identify the various categories; his descriptive content is clear and concise; and there are ample illustrations of all the barn types. In all, his system exemplifies his level of authority in any discussion of the topic. However, perhaps a special subsection might have been included with a specific emphasis on a potentially confusing situation that exists with two non-Pennsylvania barns found in the Pennsylvania barn core area (the region with the greatest concentration of key types). One is the unbanked one-level ground barn found in many of the counties of southeastern Pennsylvania; the second is the English Lake District two-level bank barn found in counties adjacent to Philadelphia. (Both were built without forebays in their original mode.) Many people associate stone barns with southeastern Pennsylvania, and many readers and wandering barn observers may be confused to learn that not all the stone barns found there are so-called Pennsylvania barns. Typically, one sees most stone barns in southeastern Pennsylvania, but the walls of some ground barns are occasionally made almost entirely of stone. The English Lake District bank barn's walls are always made entirely of stone. These points are covered in the book, but not under one specific category.

\* \* \*

When one considers the three major early barn forms in America—Pennsylvania, English, and Dutch—one sees that it was the Pennsylvania barn that saw more forms develop and evolve than the other two combined. Ensminger examines the most important transitions in the development of the various classes and types of the Pennsylvania barn and the reasons for them. He includes a brief discussion on the shift of the Prätigau forebay bank barn to the log Sweitzer of Pennsylvania, and then analyzes four of the most significant evolutionary schemes: log to classic Sweitzer; classic Sweitzer to closed-forebay standard; and the separate evolution of both the extended supported-forebay and the rear-extension Pennsylvania barn.

In his analyses Ensminger cites examples of barn forms that evolved basically as responses to changing and expanding agricultural practices. The initial example involves the change from the log to the classic Sweitzer barn, which was often built of stone. This shift reflected a new prosperity—a more developed and stable economy. But the shifting farm economy in southeastern Pennsylvania does not explain the genesis of the standard Pennsylvania barn. Its relatively small dimensions "may have been compatible with the smaller size of many farms in certain areas of Bucks and Montgomery counties" where they were first built. Indeed, "in these areas, with their adjacent English influences, the shallow, almost functionless forebay of

early standard barns may reflect a style concession to the Swiss-Germanic forebay, which was so dominant just to the north and west. The early closed-forebay standard barn may represent another example of the fusion of English and Pennsylvania-German barn forms."

There is another explanation of the development of the standard closed-forebay barn given too, this one involving its relationship to the classic Sweitzer barn. And, as already noted, there is also a discussion of the separate evolution of two types of extended Pennsylvania barns. Included in this chapter as well is an interesting explanation (with an accompanying diagram) of the way bents were erected on early barns; diagrams of the bent typologies of various classes; and, summarizing all, a diagram of Ensminger's conjectured evolution of the Pennsylvania barn. With thirty-four stages represented, it demonstrates the magnificent multiplicity of forms generated, from the first types (from about 1725) to the last (about 1900). Interestingly enough, the greatest number of forms appeared from 1800 to 1850. That styles go in and out of fashion according to need is true now, and was true then.

\* \* \*

Discussing the diffusion and distribution of Pennsylvania barns, Ensminger designates three different areas, according to the number of examples found in each. Since the already-mentioned core was an area heavily populated early by German and Swiss immigrants, it is not surprising that the greatest concentration of Pennsylvania barns is found there. Taking the form of a somewhat flattened ellipse, the Pennsylvania barn core extends in a southwesterly direction from the northeast corner of Northampton County on the Delaware River, across the Susquehanna River to Franklin County and on into Maryland. Approximately 160 miles long and forty-five miles wide along most of its length, it includes all of Adams County and parts of twelve other counties in Pennsylvania, and parts of three counties in Maryland.

The domain is Ensminger's name for an area which "covers the entire southeastern quarter of Pennsylvania, extends into nearby parts of New Jersey, Maryland, and West Virginia, and projects southwest along the Great Valley into western Virginia." While not as numerous as in the core area, Pennsylvania barns are nonetheless in the majority in the domain, an area originally "plotted by Joseph Glass, who accomplished the first mapping of the distribution of Pennsylvania barns through many years of intensive fieldwork."

The last area, the sphere, shows the spread of the Pennsylvania barn far beyond the state's borders. To the north, the sphere includes all but the extreme northeast corner of Pennsylvania, a part of New York State, the southern half of the Canadian province of Ontario, and parts of Michigan and Wisconsin. To the south, it covers most of Maryland, West Virginia, and northwestern and western Virginia; and it extends into the midwest as far as Iowa. (An excellent map shows the three areas.)

Ensminger discusses the forces that influenced migration, since "maps, particularly of the midwest, that show migration from Pennsylvania reveal that migration patterns correlate closely with the distribution of Pennsylvania barns." (This is particularly true of the migration patterns of the Plain People—especially the Mennonites.) He also describes in detail the places where Pennsylvania barns are found—often county by county in states other than Pennsylvania. His sources are the sum total of his meanderings, of information from printed material, and a myriad of sightings by qualified observers. Two of these, one from Oregon and one from Washington State, confirm that the Pennsylvania barn was even built in the far west! (Its widespread distribution stands in stark contrast to the Dutch barn, found almost exclusively in New York and New Jersey.)

Concerning the prognosis for the continued existence of the Pennsylvania barn, the author has both good and bad news. On the negative side, many have already been lost to suburban sprawl, since the core area lies in one of the most rapidly developing areas of the eastern United States. Then, too, a number of barns are lost each year to lightening and arson fires, while still others, unused, simply deteriorate.

On a more positive note, many barns continue to be used for agricultural purposes, and this is the key to preservation. While most barns used by small or part-time farmers do not have to be altered, large-scale farming often means owners have to greatly expand their facilities. As Ensminger notes, "while some purists may not approve [of these alterations], the bottom line is that the basic original structure of the barns is usually fairly well preserved." Pennsylvania barns are also preserved in other ways: some are restored or maintained by individuals for personal reasons; others by citizens' organizations or by the National Park Service; and some are recycled into offices, homes, or stores. Again, though some may object, Ensminger feels that saving the basic structure is the most important consideration. Indeed, one of his reasons for writing the book was to increase appreciation for the Pennsylvania barn and stimulate preservation efforts such as the above.

\* \* \*

Found now even in the far western United States, the Pennsylvania barn has traveled a long way from its origins in eastern Switzerland. It is a journey that proves the vitality—and especially the versatility—of a building tradition that goes back at least four hundred years. It is a journey well-chronicled by Robert Ensminger, who devoted fifteen years of his life to the task. Often challenging accepted wisdom, he has produced a major publication about a major example of American vernacular architecture. With its statements and conclusions supported by more thoroughgoing and systematic research than appears in any other book of its kind, *The Pennsylvania Barn* could well serve as a model for future researchers seeking to tell the story of other barn configurations.

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