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Letter From Helen Gardner Heiland to Alfred L. Shoemaker, August 2, 1954

Helen Gardner Heiland

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Recommended Citation

Heiland, Helen Gardner, "Letter From Helen Gardner Heiland to Alfred L. Shoemaker, August 2, 1954" (1954). *Alfred L. Shoemaker Folk Cultural Documents*. 63.
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401-2a

703 Buell Ave Joliet Ill.
August 2, 1954

Dr. Alfred Shoemaker
Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster , Pa.

Dear Sir:

Relations of mine, living in Lancaster have sent me some of the newspaper articles concerning the Pennsylvania Dutch festivals. In one of the articles I saw your name, professor of American Folklore at the college. It mentioned also that the purpose of these festivals each year was to keep these "Penn. Dutch Customs alive".

I thought the experiences I have had may interest you. I was born in Lancaster Pa. My mother's family has always lived there. My father's family lived in that vicinity and in Adams County. We moved to Joliet in 1930. I was 12 years old then. I completed my education in Illinois schools. I was Children's Librarian in the Joliet Public Library and it was here that my so called hobby began. We received books in our department with stories of the Penn. Dutch specially the Amish class of people. I ordered for the department as many children's books on these people that were available.

Because of my early years living in the vicinity of the Penn. Dutch I knew many of their customs. The people here did not know about these people and wanted to learn more. So I decided for a Book Week attraction in the library to feature the books on the Penn. Dutch and have a display of their way of living. Through our contacts in Lancaster I purchased the little dolls dressed in Amish garb, also the miniature furniture which can be purchased in Lancaster.

The display created much interest among children-the display being a farm scene showing the home, their mode of living and as many customs as I could detail. The parents coming into the library with their children were interested also. So much so that they asked me to prepare a program to present to some of their organizations such as P.T.A.'s Women's Clubs, Church groups and also the Rotaty, Lions and other community meetings.

This started about 5 years ago and the interest still exists. Each year I am asked to different groups until I think about every person has heard the program in this locality. A few months ago the Chicago Tribune Newspaper editor of the neighborhood section called me. They had seen the program publicity in some of the surburban papers and it interested them. They invited me to come to their office and tell them all the interests I portrayed in the program. So in May they printed in the neighborhood section with pictures in headlines my hobby. This as a matter of course was read by many people in Chicago area. Calls have come as a response to this from organizations in this area asking for the program.

A few weeks ago I received a call for an interview about the program from Columbia Braodcasting (station) Television, To appear on their program "Shopping with Miss Lee". This I did.

There is so much to the subject of Penn. Dutch the Amish and the folk art that you can not give much in a short program. People are so interested in learning about others and being entertained at the same time that this type of program seems to have taken the place of book reviews. I have studied a lot about these people and have a warm spot in my heart for the country and the poeple. From family and friends I gather new stories and sayings to keep my program new and alive. I love telling people about these unusual folk who gave so much to our American Heritage and have made Penn. a farmer's paradise.

I do not work permanently at the Library now as I am married and have a 2 year old son. But I keep alive my interest and have a story hour at the library every Saturday morning at 10 A.M.
Any suggestions you would have I would greatly appreciate

Sincerely

Helen G. Heiland

Helen Gardner Heiland

[Mrs. Allen Heiland]
[703 Buell Ave.
Joliet, Ill.]