

MHEP Quarterly

Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania

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Quilted wall hanging made by the Variable Star Quilters, based in Souderton, PA, in about 1990. The image was taken from an old photo showing J. Everett Nyce & friend holding a pet rooster on a farm near Vernfield, Montgomery County, circa 1912.
Gift of the Variable Star Quilters.

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2015 at the Mennonite Heritage Center

Year's end tends to bring reflections about the people and happenings of the past twelve months. For the Mennonite Heritage Center, 2015 highlights included two new staff members (Steve Diehl, Director of Advancement, and Tim Kennel, Volunteer Coordinator), a monthly hymn sing where the participants sang through the *Mennonite Hymnal*, a two day bus tour to a Bruderhof Community, and the skilled artistry of the Zook dioramas exhibit. On a less positive note, we canceled the full Apple Butter Frolic for the first time in 42 years because of stormy weather but sold out of the delicious event food as take out by noon.

Joel Alderfer, Collections Manager, and members of the Collections Committee (Ray Hacker, Mary Jane Hershey, Duane Kauffman, Forrest Moyer, Anne Yoder and myself) reviewed potential artifact donations throughout the year. We are thankful to donors who consider placing family items with the Mennonite Heritage Center to preserve and share them with the wider community. See pages 8-9 for photos of an interesting selection of artifacts that were added to the museum collections this past year. Our online collections database provides a comprehensive overview of the museum collection. Go to www.mhep.org and click on Library/Collections. Learning about the collections would be a fine way to spend a cold winter evening.

We are grateful for the sixteen pieces of Mennonite-related fraktur that were received from the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, PA, in exchange for a valuable Schwenkfelder needlework picture. The exchange was made possible by the generosity of an anonymous donor and the cooperation of SLHC and MHC staff and collections committees. Most of these pieces are currently on display in the fraktur gallery at the MHC.

And thank you to John Ruth for sharing a chapter from his upcoming work *Listening to Salconia*. John grew up in the era when local Pennsylvania Dutch traditions were giving way to the broader American culture and both the positives and negatives of a small, interrelated community were beginning to fade from Mennonite congregations. While Pennsylvania Dutch is lost locally, the dialect is alive and well among the Old Order groups. I am looking forward to hearing Mark Loudon speak about the Pennsylvania Dutch language at our Annual Heritage Fundraiser on April 22. Please see page 11 for information about the event.

With best wishes for 2016,
Sarah Heffner
Director



One of the fraktur that was received in 2015. Spiritual drawing, ca. 1816, attributed to schoolmaster Rudolph [Ralph] Landes (1789-1852) of Hilltown Township, decorated with two angels, birds, flowers, a tree, and clusters of grapes. The texts are verses from hymns about salvation, the shortness of life on earth, and flying away to Heaven. The acquisition of this beautiful fraktur was made possible by the donation of an anonymous donor.

Tongues Shall Fail

By John L. Ruth

(The following sketch, attempting to evoke the flavor of speech in the Lower Salford / Franconia community of my childhood during its transition from "Pennsylvania Dutch" to English, is adapted from chapter 2 of a manuscript I have been calling "Listening to Salconia.")

Ich bin geboren, deutsch zu fühlen,
Bin ganz auf deutsches Denken eingestellt.

(I was born to feel German,
With a completely German way of thinking.)

- Bogislav von Selchow

"A good, upright manager," opined Souderton's old miller Hermann Gottschall in 1889, "can always make money -- there is no lack of that. What may be lacking is poor management, by which a man loses his credit even while blaming something else."

So American, Pennsylvanian, and, to be candid, Mennonite.

Well before towns, clothing and cigar factories and public schools had redrawn Salconia's landscape, sons of both of Hermann and Katy Gottschall's birth clans had taken up milling as the best escape from the *scheierhof* (barnyard) without moving west or to the city. Bachelor schoolteachers Hermann and Samuel, sons of Franconia Mennonite Bishop Jacob Gottschall, had begun their venture in 1840, four miles up the Branch Creek from the much older Alderfer milldam in Lower Salford where Herman had found his wife Katy.

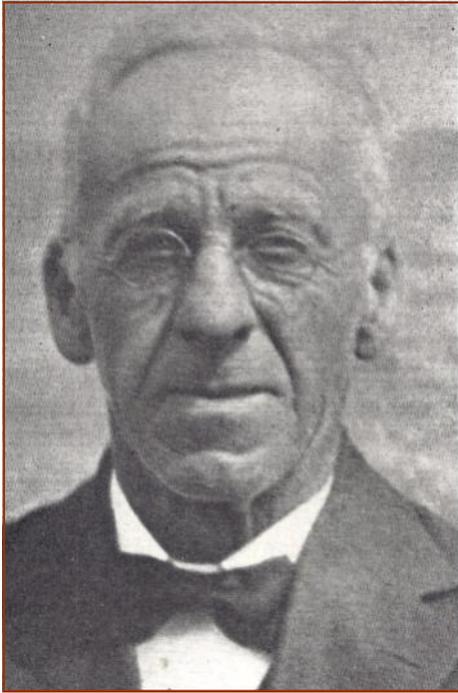


Musselman's Mill on the Indian Creek in Franconia in 1899.

Photo credit: John Ruth

Though successful, both Gottschall and Alderfer clans were frugal. They could twit a non-Mennonite Bucks County miller named Krout for being so scotch with the oil that his gears would groan, "*Ich kann nimmy, Ich kann nimmy.*" (I can't any more.) Krout's stingy lubrication, joked neighbors, would only change the lament to "*Muss ich wieder, muss ich wieder?*" (Must I again?) Similarly mocked was Deep Run's preacher Enos Wismer, whose dry-axled windmill, raspy as its owner's bass voice, would vainly screech, "*Enos, schmier! Enos, schmier!*" (Enos, grease!)

Oh yes, our people listened in Dutch, re-grinding any and all such grist in Sunday visits or evenings with store-sitters. The slither-and-thump of a loom or the creaking of a wheelbarrow at various speeds had humorous *pfälzisch* accents. The little locomotives on the Perkiomen Line could be heard starting off with a mildly profane "*Haffadeckel, haffadeckel, haffadeckel, dunnerwetter, haffadeckel, dunnerwetter, dunnerwetter, dunnerwetter*" (Invoking "dunnerwetter", literally "thundering weather", was too irreverent an interjection for a pious Pennsylvania Mennonite.)



Ambitious Harleysville businessman Manasses Clemens, ca. 1920, quoted as saying "*S'iss nix zu deier, wann's geld macht.*" (Nothing is too dear if it makes money.) *Photo credit: John Ruth*

Our parrots themselves could talk Dutch. One in an Amish home, we were told, kept insisting, "*Wu iss de Lavina?*"

Of course, the language change was bringing in English sounds. An Old Order woman's washing machine squeaked *Katherine's* it all Monday morning, and an insolvent Butter Valley man who had failed to learn his grandparents' Dutch was annoyed by his guinea hens squawking *Pay your debts! pay your debts!* A twelve-year-old boy making home deliveries from his father's market stand in Philadelphia hated to enter a house where an English-speaking parrot never failed to announce, "The farmer's here, the farmer's here!"

The sayings of Salconia -- when every creek valley still had its own accent! A century later, an ambitious businessman in Harleysville was quoted as saying, "*S'iss nix zu deier, wann's geld macht.*" (Nothing is too dear if it makes money.) Coming from a hard-shoed entrepreneur who got rich twice without leaving his village, this had sounded proudly tasteless. Actually, if too egregious, a salty locution might even appear, authorship barely veiled, in the "Town Topics" of Souderton's *Independent*, Harleysville's *News*, or Schwenksville's *Item*.

It was actually after no less than four of Bishop Jacob Gottschall's bright sons had followed their father as teenaged schoolteachers that Hermann and Samuel had bought their own mill on the Branch in Upper Salford. Their business in the two decades following was enhanced by a nearby county-financed, three-arched bridge. Then

another opportunity beckoned: a "Franconia Station" on a new railroad running north to Bethlehem. Soon to be called "Souder's," the bare depot quickly mushroomed into "Souder's Station." By the time it was fully "Souderton" the Gottschall brothers had become major investors in its real estate.

Down the Philadelphia-bound tracks in equally new Lansdale and North Wales other rural-born Mennonite millers included a nephew of the Gottschalls with a larger operation he renamed "Centennial Mills" in 1876. With this advance, he swapped his Mennonite membership for one in a church with a steeple.

Uncles Hermann and Sam stayed Mennonite, but by 1889 the mill still groaning across the corner from Hermann's house in Souderton was no longer his. Mere dismay had crowned his attempt in 1867 to transmit the family business to the horse-loving blade married to his only child Susan. "*Seller war awwer 'n k'schicht,*" ("High German: That fellow was a story, all right) gossiped the locals of the gaudy son-in-law who, after siring Hermann's only two grandchildren in Philadelphia and ostentatiously singing hymns on the Gottschalls' Souderton doorstep, had decamped to Cincinnati, leaving his little family supportless in the city. The mill had then been sadly sold to a dependable Mennonite pair of Moyer brothers.

Salconia would never lack its quota of heartbreak.

Was it spleen, then, pain-turned-bitter, or conscience that was goading seventy-year-old Hermann Gottschall, with nothing to show for his prime decades except his mill-facing stone house, bank and turnpike stocks, and sad-faced wife Katy, to announce in 1889, "I feel it my duty to write something"?

In retirement, this imperious "*Suprintent*" of Souderton's union German Sunday School had time for spiritual ploys. It was he who shook the hands of Lancaster County Mennonite preachers stepping with deep-shawled wives from "the cars" a block up Main Street from the Gottschalls' front door. On Saturday afternoons Hermann would lure town-children out to the school beside the Franconia Meetinghouse, to coax from their throats the German chorale-tunes of his own pre-railroad youth. He even copied out, for whoever might benefit, a German cursive alphabet, in a hand as firm as when he had taught it in a school on his father's farm sixty years earlier. And

it was Hermann who, not at all *leut-scheu* (afraid of people) - as a charitable neighbor put it - had written the series of change-critiquing encyclicals aimed at the liberal or "New" Mennonites that were appearing in the village newspapers.

Herman knew well the emotions exacted by *eppes neies* (anything new) – among his Mennonite relatives who still thought in the *muddersprooch* (mother tongue). He and his Branch Valley-born wife Katy could name almost any adult in the fabric of farms, unlinked by hard roads, that still slowed the local creep of Americanization. It seemed that the telephones tinkling in the village stores, carrying Dutch as readily as English, were only binding Salconians closer. On Sundays they still visited each other "for dinner," as a grandson would remember it, "like everything."



Franconia Meetinghouse School, 1908. Children spoke Pa Dutch at home and learned English when they began attending school. *Photo credit: MHC*

But alas, though children beginning school knew only Dutch, their tongues were increasingly pestered there to shape the nearly impossible English "j" and "th," to opt instantly between "w" and "v," and to pretend ownership of a foppish diphthong that almost bent a word like "cow" into two syllables. As if their Dutchified parents' plain "kaa" wasn't equally clear, and humbler to boot!

A growing fund of bi-lingual pratfalls tickled local memory. Decades earlier a Deep Run schoolmaster had written, with mock seriousness: A man without learning, money or wit
To travel the world is werry unfit.

Canadian visitors told of one of their ministers who, insisting he could preach in English, convulsed a benchful of girls by proclaiming, "In the Old Testament, a wow was a wow!" Worse than that, another one, while exegeting St. Paul on the woman's veiling, turned the "air" in "hair" into "or."

The humor went two ways, of course. Dutch people, making fun of the merely "English," invented a mythical Franconian schoolboy, instructed in first grade to take a front seat, contending "My name ain't Bench; it's Chake!" A teacher imported from Bucks County, vainly pretending to handle Dutch, was laughed to scorn by Salconian pupils he fecklessly admonished to "*sauf*" rather than "*trink*" all the water in the dipper. (Animals of drunkards *sauf*; humans *trink*.) Then there was the Skippack instructor who, though he considered himself quite English, was forced to dismiss a boy from a spelling bee for phonetically spelling the word "farther" just as the teacher had pronounced it: "farser." A young schoolmarm brought up at Souder's Station complained that her Salconian pupils were "so Dutch they don't know when they're being scolded," and that "Nobody knows when I tell a joke unless I laugh at it myself."

In fact, English did strike many Salconian ears as more style than substance. Regarding a stranger, they might wink, "*Iss' er ganz Englisch?*" (Is he completely English?) If he was, there was a temperamental distance. A business-seeking city fellow trying to talk Dutch sounded dumber than a Salconian telling a stranger to "Make the light out," or worse, to "outen" it. And only a transient Yankee would fail to harden the b in "New Harbor" (the name of Souderton's post office) into a p.

These were years when people who had gone to school in the 1850's complained that they had been taught neither German nor English pronunciation right, and had been mixed up ever since.

Silly little Benjamin Wismer wrote on his tablet –
*An old crow sat on a hickory limb. None knew him but to praise.
 Let me kiss him for his mother For he smells of Schmeirkase
 Mary hat a little lamp He could a tale unfold
 He had no teeth to eat a hoe cake as his spectacles were gold.*

Dutch was still so dominant here that even the local-born children of southern blacks who had come up after the Civil War to work at powder mills on the Perkiomen could hardly speak English. Within months of immigration, an Italian mill-hand in Upper Salford could count "Ains, zway, drey." In Souderton's tiny bank, Lutheran and Reformed trustees haggled in Dutch even as their secretary wrote up the minutes in English, while in the Courthouse at Norristown Judge Aaron Swartz, a grown-up Lower Salford farm-boy, opted to hear some cases in *Deutsch*.



Peddler Abe Levinson, Jr., at a Lower Salford Mennonite farm, ca. 1942. Photo credit: John Ruth

Even the Yiddish of peddlers from Russia spreading their packs on Salconia's kitchen floors was close enough to Dutch to work. After a dog in Harleysville barked at Abe Levinson's famished horse, children (without detecting a commercial motive) reported him muttering, "*Brauchst net bang sei', sie sin' Menishte.*" (You don't have to be scared; they're Mennonites.)

To learn English in school after the Dutch had been absorbed with mother's milk was to drape an acquired skill over an original neural imprint. As was clear when a Branch Valley grandmother, Dutch enough to make even neighbors smile, suffered a stroke, and then talked

only English. Another Salconian, who had lived years with Indians in Canada, when awaking from *his* stroke, was reported by his family as only able to speak Chippewa.

Whether "gay" or "plain," one laughed more viscerally -- even at oneself -- in the *Muddersprooch*. "No matter how many times I hear a Dutch joke," confesses an old woman, "I laugh just as hard as the first time." A Mennonite from the Butter Valley, Ernest Gehman Gehman, who got a Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Heidelberg wrote that "Dutch automatically puts both its users and its hearers into good humor." Another native claimed, "The Germans originated the word home." Indeed, what equivalent would English have for the idiom of "*Es haimelt mich au*" (It gives me a feeling of my home)? And one needed no Dutch for something as petty as "Excuse me," when a simple "Oops" worked in any language.

"I am told," remarks a bishop of the Lancaster Plain People, that "you speak the English language on the front end of the tongue, and the German on the back end." The advantage of such bilinguality, he claims, is that "if the one end gets tired you use the other one."

There was an intramural expression, "*Er iss' ke' Menisht,*" (He's not a Mennonite) to embarrass the worldly grandchildren of Salconians using it. And though it would take the more *rauboschdich* (In this usage, rambunctious or irreverent) people from above Salconia's boulder-strewn northern Ridge to quip, "If you ain't Dutch you ain't much," anybody from *Menishdeland* (Literally, Mennonite-land¹), along the Branch might smile at the rhyme. In turn, Salconians regarded the bushy, gray-soiled region *owwe die Barigschtross* (above the Ridge Road), where few thrifty Mennonites had settled, as a zone "*Wu die Fix un' die Hasse 'n anner gutnacht gewwe*" (Where the foxes and the rabbits say goodnight to each other.)

And oh how spiritual nuance vaporized in translation! When plain Salconians spoke of good neighbors as *Kariche-Leit*, (Church-people) they simply meant *Ludrisch* (Lutheran) or *Reformiert* (Reformed) people. If a child should ask, "Well, aren't we church people?" she might be told, "*Mir sin' bei die G'may*" (We belong to the congregation/

community). We don't *go* to church; we *are* a church. Our church goes to *Fasammlung* (meeting, meetinghouse). If the child persisted, a parent might open a historic Mennonite tome called *The Martyrs Mirror*, with etchings of European Anabaptists being drowned, beheaded or (if dealt with by Catholic authorities) burned at the stake, to show that their Mennonite descendants were by charter a rejected people, whose chief tormentor had once been the worldly Church itself.

Strange thought for peaceful Salconian Mennonites, whose worst persecution for their five American generations had been bemused Lutheran remarks about their dull preaching.

As for the fearful religion credited with the bonfires in the enormous *Mirror*, so few claimed it between the North Penn and Perkiomen Railroads that as late as 1910 a Salconian store-sitter could mutter after a departing customer, "I don't trust that man. He looks like a Catholic." Thank goodness, the lout didn't speak for his own Mennonite preacher, Christian Allebach of Towamencin, who used to invite the only priest in Lansdale for Sunday dinner.

Meanwhile, Salconian sons returning from tiny midwestern colleges smiled wisely in speeches at teachers' institutes, as they quoted the proverbial Dutch crone's claim that the Bible itself must have been originally in German. It was common knowledge, she reminded listeners, that God himself, in the Garden of Eden, had called out, "*Adam, wu bisht du?*"

Endnote

1. The region of thickest Mennonite settlement running northeastward from Skippack through Lower Salford, Franconia and Hilltown Townships into Bedminster Township in Bucks County.



Mennonite Heritage Center 2015-16 History Essay Contest

The Mennonite Heritage Center (MHC) is pleased to announce that the 2015-16 History Essay Contest is now open. The purpose is to promote youth awareness of and interest in Eastern Pennsylvania history. Prizes will be awarded as follows: First prize \$500; Second prize \$250; and Third prize \$250. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded in June 2016.

The contest is open to all students in 9th through 12th grades in public, private, and home school. Students of immediate family of MHC staff or Board members are not eligible.

Essays must be written about Eastern Pennsylvania history – for example, topics could deal with religion, biography, cultural trends, occupations such as farming or Philadelphia marketing, major events such as disasters like train wrecks and fires, etc, founding of an institution, etc. Essays must be 1,000-1,750 words. End notes and bibliography are not part of the total word count. Submissions must be received or postmarked by April 1, 2016.

For complete information on the essay requirements, the contest entrance form and submission process, please see our website: www.mhep.org or call Steve Diehl, Director of Advancement at 215-256-3020 x.115.

A Sampling of 2015 Acquisitions



A “two-ended” wooden feed pail with different sized openings for measuring feed for cows and horses from the farm of Paul & Dorothy Gable of Blooming Glen. *Gift of Peter L. Hunsberger*



Toy truck from the family of Elmer G. & Emily Kolb of Pottstown, PA, circa 1940s. Purchased by the donors on Elmer & Emily's household auction in Pottstown, in the late 1970s. *Gift of Noah and Sara Kolb*



Photograph of the potato harvest on the J. Wallace & Viola Groover Moyer farm, Blooming Glen, 1930s. *Gift of Diane DeTurk Herzog*



Vorschrift (writing model), signed Martin Moyer and dated October 25, 1835. Features the first and sixth verses of hymn "Herr es ist von meinem leben..." (by Benjamin Schmolck, pg. 314 in the Zions Harfe, 1834) followed by a prayer, the date and signature. The first four lines are in fraktur lettering, and the rest of the text in German script, except the signature which is in English. Another spiritual saying or prayer is in the bottom left, in a separate box. The first line is fraktur lettering and the rest German script. *Acquired through the Donation of a MHC member.*



Apple butter kettle purchased at the auction of Oscar S. Rosenberger (1892-1980), near Spinnerstown, Milford Township, Bucks County in about 1970. He was a member of West Swamp Mennonite Church, and had a fruit and vegetable farm on Keiper Rd., near Spinnerstown. *Gift of Ray and Agnes Hacker*



Farm wagon built by the Columbia Wagon Company, Columbia, PA, probably in the 1890s. Has a stencil painted label on the back: "Sold & Warranted by J. K. Clemmer & Son, Spring Mount, PA". This was John K. Clemmer (1861-1916) who operated a grist mill on the Perkiomen Creek in Upper Salford Township, close to the village of Spring Mount, from 1893 into the early 20th century. The wagon previously came from the farm of Elbert Stump (Lawn Ave. near Grand View Hospital), Sellersville, PA, and was bought by Roy S. Landis at the Stump farm auction. Sold at the estate auction of Roy Landis in Blooming Glen, October 2015, and purchased by the Mennonite Heritage Center with contributions from several donors.

Notes from the Advancement Desk

“...to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time.”
--T.S. Eliot

Thank you for so warmly receiving me into our community in 2015. Working in Advancement at MHEP has been a great way to reacquaint myself with the land and its people. I have often had this quote from T.S. Eliot in mind. I think it also suggests why so many people value the work of the Center.

2015 saw the continuation of successful fundraising efforts. Both the Heritage Banquet and the Whack and Roll croquet tournament were held in the spring. We are already busy planning each of these for 2016. We appreciate your support at these events and hope you will join us for the banquet on April 22 at Deep Run East Church and for Whack and Roll on June 3-4.

In the fall, John L. Ruth, in support of our efforts, shared insights from his research on the transfer of land from the Lenape to European immigrants. John was interviewed on BuxMont Live on WNPV. About 130 people joined us for his public talk. John also read from a draft of his first chapter to a special donor appreciation dinner held at the Center.

Our annual campaign was called “40 for 40”. As the second year of a three year push to fully fund our work from annual revenue, eight donors gave \$5000 each to match any dollar given by a new or re-engaged donor. While we haven’t reached that goal as of this writing, we do have 40 new donors!

Thank you for being part of a community of 336 people, churches, and businesses that supported the mission of MHEP this year!

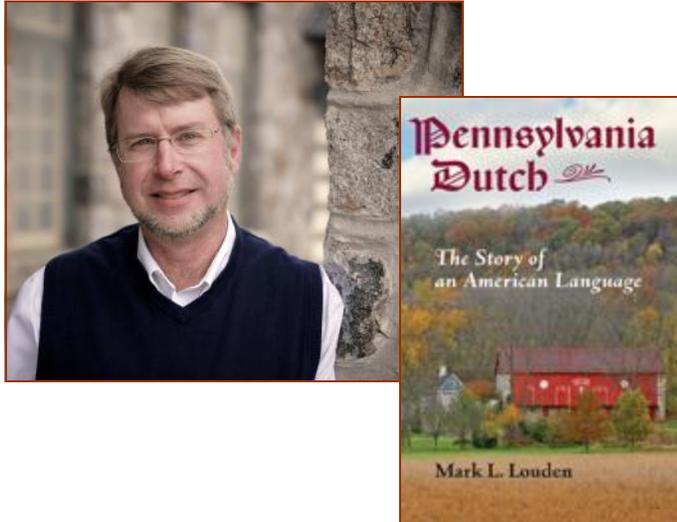
Steve Diehl
Director of Advancement



The Whack & Roll Croquet Tournament was a fun community event! Pictured on the left is the Second Place team of Ivan Derstine and Delphin Monga who played for Living Hope Farm. Above is Herman Bontrager, speaker at the 2015 Heritage Banquet, talking with John L. Ruth. *Photo credits: Jack Dyson, Alyssa Kerns*

Mark your calendars

Annual Heritage Fundraiser Dinner
Friday, April 22, 2016 at 6 pm
Deep Run Mennonite Church East
350 Kellers Church Road, Perkasie, PA 18944



The evening will feature a delicious catered meal served buffet style, along with speaker Mark Loudon presenting a program on: **“The Pennsylvania Dutch Language, Past and Present”**. Tickets are \$50 and must be purchased in advance from the Museum Store at the Mennonite Heritage Center, or online via Paypal. Visit the website at www.mhep.org.

Mark Loudon received his undergraduate and graduate training in Germanic linguistics at Cornell University. A fluent speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch, he has written extensively on the history and contemporary situation of the language and its speakers. He is the author of *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language* (padutch.net), which is to appear in early 2016 in the Young Center Series published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. We will have copies of the book available for purchasing at the event.

In addition to his academic research, he is involved in a number of public outreach activities related to the language, faith, and culture of its main speakers today--the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites. He also serves as an interpreter and cultural mediator for Pennsylvania Dutch speakers in the legal and health care systems.

Plan to attend this very interesting program and support the Mennonite Heritage Center.

MENNONITE HISTORIANS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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Mennonite Heritage Center

565 Yoder Road
Harleysville, PA 19438
Telephone: 215.256.3020
FAX: 215.256.3023
e-mail: info@mhep.org
Web: www.mhep.org

Museum & Library Hours

Tuesday - Friday
10 am to 5 pm
Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm

The mission of the Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania is to collect, preserve, and interpret the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage in order to educate, inspire, and witness to the church and broader community.



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2016 Events

Friday, April 22, 6 to 9 pm. Deep Run Mennonite Church East. Annual Heritage Fundraiser. Please see page 11 for information.

Sunday, May 1, 4 to 6 pm. Hymn Sing at Frick's Meetinghouse. No reservations required.

Friday and Saturday, June 3 and 4. Whack & Roll Croquet Tournament. Senior Tournament, Peaceful Living Tournament and Youth Survivor Tournament on Friday, and the Nonprofit Invitational Tournament on Saturday.

Thursday to Saturday, July 21 to 23. Used Book Sale.

Saturday, October 1. Annual Apple Butter Frolic.

Saturday and Sunday, December 2 and 3. Christmas Marketplace Joint Tour with Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center and the Goschenhoppen Historians.

Bus Tour and Workshop Schedules available in late January.