

# Wentz Post

*A Publication of the Peter Wentz Farmstead Society*

Volume XXXVI, No. 2

WENTZ POST Fall 2019

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

*by Margaret Bleecker Blades*

We are very excited to announce that Scott Houting will be the new curator at the Peter Wentz Farmstead, as of August 14. Scott comes to Wentz from the Valley Forge National Historical Park, where he has had much experience in conducting museum collections care and management projects, as well as in interpretive programs. He and his wife, Beth, live in Pottstown in a late 18th-century farmhouse they restored. We look forward to working with Scott and to introducing him to you all.

The Girls, as the heifer team of Peg and Sam are known, had some time off during the worst of the summer heat, but are now getting back into harness, continuing their training and work on the farm. They, along with farmers Jay Ryan and Rich Poole, were the star attraction one afternoon for the Farmstead's Wentz Wonder Kids Camp, the summer camp session for 4- and 5-year-olds.

Towering over our young visitors, Peg and Sam remained calm and gentle, allowing the children—and Farmstead staff—to lightly brush them, talk to them, and finally to watch as they were hooked up to their very handsome two-wheeled cart. Responding to voice commands and signals from Farmer Jay, the girls walked along the driveway, out into the mowed hay field, and toured the farm. These gentle giants gave a great demonstration of how animals and their humans work well together when their training is based on consistent, firm direction and respect. This aspect of 18th-century farm life can be viewed at only a few historic farms in the region, making a visit to the Peter Wentz Farmstead for a demonstration of Peg and Sam pulling their cart an especially memorable experience.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) grant-funded project to examine in detail the balcony over the front door of the house is active again. The joists that extend beyond the frame of the house to support the pent roof and the balcony floor were noted to be water stained and possibly damaged and potentially weakened. A structural engineer experienced in working on historic buildings visited to examine the evidence visible. He recommended using a micro-camera inserted into very small holes drilled into replacement floor boards in the second-floor hall; but the photographs were inconclusive. More powerful equipment was needed, along with a scientist experienced in wood structure and chemistry to accurately interpret the findings.

As a result, wood scientist Ron Anthony visited the Peter Wentz Farmstead on August 14 – 16. Once we receive his findings, they will give us information about the species of wood used, if it is the same species as in other areas of the house frame, what condition it is in, and if it can still carry the load of the pent roof and balcony. More updates will follow.

And finally, news that is both exciting and sad. Kim Boice, who has been the educator at Peter Wentz Farmstead for the past sixteen years, is leaving to take a new job as Executive Director of Historic Fallsington, in Bucks County. This is a spectacular opportunity for Kim, and she is looking forward to the new challenges. We appreciate all the wonderful summer camps, education programs, and special events she has conceived and so elegantly produced for the Farmstead, and we will miss her. Thank you, Kim, and all best wishes in your new position!



Jay, Peg, and a summer camper. (See page 5 for other photos.)



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*by Kathy Yost*

It seems to me that we were talking about change in the last issue too. How can one work at a historic site where so much has not changed in a very long time and then be surrounded with change? Amazing! This issue brings you updates from the garden, the staff, and the site. We have lost several "Wentz Society Angels" this year and we try to honor them in this issue. Meg's Site Report will provide a great deal of detail about this year's farm crops, animals, and even staff changes. Thanks to Donna and the Wentz Weeders for yet another amazing year. I am investigating how to install 1700's air conditioning somewhere in that garden for them. This was a hot one.

Take pride in the "Society Funded" improvements: from the plants for the garden to new inventory in the Museum Shop to funding for summer camps to equipment for "our girls" to new signage for the site. We make a difference. Our thoughts and opinions are valued. We strive to fulfill our Mission.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

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

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New Structures-All Members  
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WENTZ POST-Frank Luther

**WENTZ POST**

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Hours of Operation

Tuesday-Saturday: 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Sunday: 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Last Tour: 3:00 PM

Closed Mondays and Holidays

Reservations required for group tours.



Photo courtesy of [haebphoto@gmail.com](mailto:haebphoto@gmail.com).

**A SAD GOODBYE**

by Linda Snyder

Kim Boice has been a familiar figure around the Peter Wentz Farmstead for sixteen years since she started part-time in July 2003. Becoming full-time in February 2004, she inherited the Colonial Camp (4-6 grades) in June that year. Interested in reaching more children and a wider age range, 2008 saw the introduction of Wentz Wonder Kids (PreK-K) with Mitte Camp (1-3 grades) appearing in 2013. These camps have kept Kim very busy each summer.

Programs that were developed with other site staff such as Night Life and the Slave Project brought a wider understanding of life at the Farmstead.

Kim enjoyed working with everyone -- volunteers, visitors, and staff. She is looking forward to the challenges she will meet at Historic Fallsington Village, Inc.: The village that time forgot. A village with a strong Quaker influence located in Lower Bucks County, Kim sees much potential and possibilities.

We will miss Kim and Kim will miss us. She will not miss her old commute. Her new one is ten minutes.



**IN MEMORIAM: SAD FAREWELLS**

Memma S. Kilgannon who left us on April 4th at the age of 95 was a longtime resident of Audubon, PA. A faithful volunteer at Peter Wentz Farmstead, she might have been seen at a special event with a blank piece of linen material slowly being covered with beautiful colored stitches, bringing to life her family "tree". A passion for genealogy, Memma devoted countless hours in study and researching her family ancestry.

Irene Ferguson at 101 left us on May 28th. Born in Philadelphia, Irene volunteered as a guide at Valley Forge Park, Morgan Log House, and over thirty years at Peter Wentz Farmstead. A skilled lucet demonstrator, she also researched the life of Martha Washington and portrayed her in talks and presentations at many venues including Peter Wentz Farmstead.

Dorothy Hern passed away on June 1st. Born in Pottstown, she was the wife of James Hern, a trustee on the Board of Peter Wentz Farmstead Historical Society. Dorothy was a member of two Country Clubs as well as the Boyertown Area Choral Association and the Dutch Country Playhouse. Dotty loved and collected Santas.

Paul Hiser was 95 when he peacefully left his home on August 1st. He was the husband of Adrienne Hiser, a longtime volunteer and former PWFS president. They were married for nearly seventy years.



*Peter Wentz Farmstead*  
**Candlelight**  
*Tours*

Saturday, December 7th  
 from 3-9pm





### THE WENTZ GARDEN 2019

*by Donna Armstrong*

Mother Nature has certainly challenged the Wentz Weeders this growing season. Extremes of rain and heat have us seriously talking about air-conditioning the garden! Until then, this hearty, dedicated group of volunteers has tried to make the best of it.

Early crop harvests have come and gone and some of our unique 18<sup>th</sup> century plants are taking over. A great "show and tell" for our visitors are the Egyptian Onions, which can be used at every stage of growth, and Costmary, which is also known as the Bible leaf, whose mint scent helped revive church goers on warm days. Job's Tears are a favorite with school children when they learn they can string them for necklaces! A vine called Hops, growing on a dead cedar tree in the corner of the garden, yields brackets used for making mead (beer). For the teetotalers we have two clumps of colorful Bee Balm (Monarda). A perennial favorite, Lovage is a perfect celery substitute.



Using long boards in the raised beds enables us to not only keep our footprints out of the cultivated soil, but it helps us to plant a straight row right along the edge.

Veggies in the center beds include some old-timers such as parsnips, kohlrabi, and swiss chard, which is enjoying a culinary revival of late.

As we leave the garden, Rosemary greets us at the gate. "Rosemary for Remembrance"

As summer turns to fall, our thoughts turn to how the Wentz family would prepare for winter. The women would already have put up some fruit jams and plan to harvest small cucumbers for the pickle crock.

Several seeds were planted for root vegetables, such as beets, carrots, parsnips and turnips. The flavor is actually enhanced by a light frost, so they are considered good keepers.



Oh, yes, herbs must be bunched and hung in the kitchen rafters for culinary uses, and also everlasting flowers arranged in bouquets to brighten the house during the dreary winter months.

Please give a garden spade salute to the dedicated Wentz Weeders: Wayne Brunt, Lori Curtis, Wendy Cusick, Melanie Kilgannon, Paul Menard, Sandra Sweeney Pat Wolback and Donna Armstrong, coordinator.



*(Photos courtesy of Donna Armstrong.)*



**THE DIRECTOR'S REPORT PHOTOS**



Kim, Rich, Jay, and Summer Campers with the Girls.



Kim as pied piper leading camp attendees.



**SIGNAGE AT THE FARMSTEAD**

by Margaret Bleecker Blades

The Peter Wentz Farmstead has so much significant, fascinating history to share! Everything from amazing and little-known facts about 18<sup>th</sup>-century life, to details about the two times General George Washington stayed at the Farmstead, information about the farmers' wonderful program to train our heifers, Peg and Sam, as oxen, to the crops, vegetables, and fruit grown on the property. to the architecture, to the families who lived here. . . we can go on!

This is our challenge. We need to tell a large and complex story in an organized and concise way. We share the information both verbally on tours and programs, and in print, especially on signage. Our current focus is the signs posted around the property, which are also a particular interest of Duffy Grove. Duffy initiated this new project to expand the number of signs and to increase the amount of information offered to visitors as they approach the house, barn.

Duffy worked with Kathy Yost, Farmstead Society Board President, to expedite this process. As a result, the Farmstead Society very generously funded a project to draft new interpretive signage for the site. Morgan McMillian Clinton, whom many of you may remember as the PWF Curator from 2003-2011, was hired to work with the current PWF staff to assemble the list of signs needed and to create the signs.

Signs will discuss topics including fields and agriculture, architecture, outbuildings, the house, the Wentz, Bieber, and Schultz families, among others. Copies of historic photographs, maps, and documents will be included.

The signs are currently in draft form. They will be revised and prototypes will welcome guests attending the Encampment Program on Sunday, October 6. We will be asking guests about their opinions of the signage—Was it helpful? Interesting? Did it help draw them into the story of the Peter Wentz Farmstead? Feedback will be used to make additional revisions and make choices about placement for the permanent signs that will be installed later in the season. Come on over to let us know what you think of the first drafts, and come on back to see the final products!



**THE MIDWIFE'S GARDEN**

by Virginia Kopacki

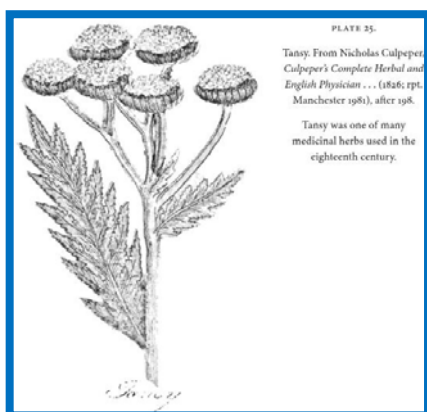
Beginning in the 18th century, formal medical care for pregnant women began shifting from the realm of the midwife to that of the physician. Still, in the country communities of colonial Pennsylvania, female midwives remained the primary caregivers for expectant women. These midwives sourced their knowledge and advice from many founts: published medical texts, personal experience, and their own gardens. Years of tradition in practice helped midwives understand which herbs to grow and which to forage, while published books and pamphlets on medicine provided new insight into what cures might or might not work.

For Pennsylvania German midwives, one of the most popular texts of the day was Christopher Sauer's *Small Herbal of Little Cost*. Published at intervals between 1762 and 1778 in Germantown, Pennsylvania, *Small Herbal* instructed midwives and the lay public on which local plants and herbs were most efficacious for treating all manner of pregnancy and postpartum complications (Klepp, 2009, p.186).



Though books were typically written by men, authors like Sauer kept in mind that women would dispense the physik they recommended. These remedies were explicitly for use by those people who lived at a great distance from academically trained medical professionals and who lacked access to commercially prepared medicine. As a result, virtually all of the ingredients in *Small Herbal* could be easily found in a garden or on a quick jaunt to the woods or the creek.

German women commonly took ragwort as a means of curing "female irregularities" of the body (Klepp, 2009, p.192). Similarly, Christopher Sauer recommended the use of plantain for the "immoderate coursing of the menses" and for treating internal wounds of the womb in his later book of botanical healing (Weaver, 2001, p.247). Expectant mothers drank chamomile tea both to calm their nerves and ease the pain of childbirth (Klepp, 2009, p.197).



Tansy, commonly grown in colonial gardens, was a so commonly suggested herb in both physician's recommendations and by practicing midwives, as noted in a Germantown medical pamphlet from 1766: "[Tansy is] warm and dry... having the fine virtue of loosening all thick humors of the body, but particularly in the matrix (womb)..dispelling...mother fits, killing and expelling worms, of warming a cold matrix and bringing a lot more into good order (Klepp, 2009, p.179)." In short, tansy was prescribed in order to begin menstruation for post-partum women, regulate the menstrual cycle, and increase fertility. Tansy, it also should be noted, was frequently prescribed by midwives as an abortifacient. These plants and others such as rue, savin, madder, snakeroot, and juniper (among many others) were indispensable to those dispensing medicine even if their properties were not well understood.

While midwives understood that some herbs seemed to work, their theories as to why were rarely accurate. Still, Pennsylvania Germans and their midwives were particularly interested in the use of herbs for treating women. Some herbs, like pennyroyal, were effective in small doses but extremely harmful in larger quantities. Though part of a midwife's obstetric care was certainly providing contraceptive information, overt references to abortifacient and contraceptive plants are relatively rare. Pennsylvania Germans, perhaps more than others, were willing to explicitly define such uses for herbs. For example, Pennsylvania Germans were well aware of the contraceptive uses of pennyroyal and its ability to "prevent impregnation" as well as service more widely recognized "female complaints" like eclampsia and obstructions in the womb.

Many of the previously mentioned herbs and plants can be found in the kitchen garden at the Peter Wentz Farmstead. Though none of this information should be used as medical advice, understanding the historical uses for the popular and beautiful plants we all enjoy today provides a glimpse into the world of our forebears as well as the importance of herbs in the practice of midwifery for the Pennsylvania Germans.

#### Sources:

Susan E. Klepp. 2009. *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820*. The University of North Carolina Press, USA.

Weaver, W. William. *Sauer's Herbal Cures: America's First Book of Botanic Healing, 1762-1778*. Routledge, NY: New York.



### KEEP MARCHING ON!

by Kim Boice

Autumn is a busy time of year in this area with seasonal activities offered at Merrymead Farm and the various township community festivals that garner everyone's time and attention. Over the last few years the fall program here has featured more of the military history of the site since it served as the temporary military headquarters of General George Washington (GW) and his staff in October 1777. By continuing to highlight this important part of the site's story, we're hoping to attract the interest of the audience interested in this subject. This year finds us continuing to make a few more changes and we hope we will entice YOU to join us as a visitor or perhaps as one of our amazing volunteers.

The Wentzes hosted General Washington and his military family beginning on 2 October 1777 to the very early morning of the 4th before the General departed for the Battle of Germantown. As early as September 29<sup>th</sup> the General's staff was planning to be at, "...Wentz's upon the Skippack Road;...", as noted in a letter from General Washington to Brigadier General Forman of the NJ Militia at "Camp Pennybecker's Mill, September 29, 1777." After the Battle, Washington and his staff stayed in the general area and returned to the Wentz Farmstead from the 16th through the 20th.

We believe that the Wentz family did not leave their home during the General's stay, but rather used some of the rooms not requested for use; GW and his staff to the left (Stove Room, Kitchen, & upper bedchamber) and the Wentz family to the right (Parlor & other rooms located on this side of the house). Remember, some seven members of the family were still living here in 1777, including: Peter (58 years old); Rosanna (60?); grown son Matthias (28); Lydia, his wife (25); their son Jonathan (15 months); David will be born in December 1777); and Peter & Rosanna's grown daughter Rosanna (22). An already full household was made temporarily more crowded with Washington, his various aides-de-camp, personal servants and slaves, and a regiment of Life Guard in and around the house.

The first weekend in October, almost exactly when GW was here before the Battle of Germantown, we will be offering a series of programs highlighting this important aspect of our site and national history.

**Night Life- October 1777 on Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup>:**

This popular program will showcase the use of the house by General Washington, but at night! An immersive experience about the shared spaces found within the walls and surrounding the Wentz household during those busy October nights. Small group tours will be offered to those ages 12+ at 7:30 / 7:50 / 8:10 / 8:30 / 8:50; PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!

**War Comes to Worcester- October 1777 on Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup> from 11am-3pm:**

We will be hosting reenactment units representing the British forces (40<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot) and the Continental Army (6<sup>th</sup> PA & 1<sup>st</sup>=New Jersey). We know that various members of regiments from both sides of the fighting were actively travelling throughout the region that fall of 1777, especially before and after the Battle. The military reenactors will be camping campaign-style within visual proximity to each other to reflect armies 'on the move.' No tents, no fires, just what everyone could carry with them to and from battles or while on patrol and using temporary shelters to guard against the weather. We also know that 'country people' were often found travelling to known encampments throughout the war to sell or trade 'country produce' and other goods to the soldiers. This year we also will have an interpreter with some seasonal vegetables to show that often forgotten aspect of the war - how it impacted the local people. We're hoping to have Sam & Peg (the oxen-in-training) out with the wagon, much as the farmers would have travelled with their goods at the time. Ruth Konrad will be preparing food items similar to what the General and his staff were known to have eaten or taken with them from the Wentz farm: LOTS of "cabith heads," potatoes, milk, some fowl (or chickens), and a few other items. Tours of the historic house will highlight the dual use of the house by the military and the Wentzes.



**WHAT JACK WORE: INCORPORATING THE HISTORY OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE AT A PENNSYLVANIA FARMSTEAD**

*by Sarah Biehl and Kimberly D. Boice*

The following was co-written by Sarah Biehl (former curator) & Kimberly Boice (former educator) at the request of the editors of the National Council on Public History blog, History@Work. It was posted on June 4, 2019 and reprinted below with their permission.

For the full article: <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/what-jack-wore/>

Editors' Note: This post is part of a History@Work series that complements *The Public Historian*, volume 40, number 3, which is about the history of the field of Black Museums. Shawn Halifax writes in "McLeod Plantation Historic Site: Sowing Truth and Change," that "many if not most historic plantations acknowledge or interpret African diasporic histories and cultures that existed within these landscapes to varying degrees." The staff at the Peter Wentz Farmstead in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania,

As historians, we know that research is never done! Sometimes we uncover the answers we seek, but quite often more questions are generated than get answered at the end of a research day. Regardless, it's our duty to keep research going to better understand the lives of those in the past. But once we acquire this information, then what? Here at the historic Peter Wentz Farmstead in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, we have included a lesser-known individual as part of our general interpretation: Jack, an enslaved man.

We recently researched his story to offer a more accurate and inclusive interpretation of how a 300-acre farm in southeastern Pennsylvania might operate during the eighteenth century. This project included numerous elements: reproducing the clothing Jack wore when he ran away in December 1769; hosting a conference on interpreting slavery in June 2018; and producing a small exhibit about Jack and slavery in the North. We also trained staff to feel comfortable when discussing this sensitive topic and to assist visitors in processing what will likely be new information for them in an engaging and thought-provoking environment.

The first part of this larger interpretation project was finding a visual way to place Jack at the site. It is likely he worked in the sawmill once owned and operated by the Wentz family, but that structure is no longer standing. If he provided general farm labor, it would not be easy to find a good way to show his work in an obvious way. We used what information we had about him to provide a more inclusive story of the people that lived and worked at the farmstead. The runaway advertisements placed shortly after his escape from the Wentz family proved invaluable in providing us with a clear picture of his appearance. Just as it does today, clothing played an important role in visually relaying messages about the wearer's religious beliefs, culture, social and economic status to those around them.

Using a runaway advertisement that described Jack in detail and making some well-informed guesses about the details not included, we reproduced most of Jack's clothing for use during hands-on lessons with school children and other visitors to the exhibit. We purchased or had made the following items of clothing: a white linsey jacket with sleeves; a white linsey under-jacket without sleeves; buckskin breeches; light blue yarn stockings; shoes with large brass buckles; and a wool hat. Many of the items worn by Jack were commonplace during the eighteenth century, but those same items today proved rather expensive to acquire. Fortunately, we received funding from four local chapters of Questers (Gaudy Dutch Questers #270, Heritage #1, Hope Lodge Questers #1394, and Militia Hill Questers #5), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving history, with matching funds provided by the Pennsylvania State Questers. This allowed us to have the most accurate items possible to provide a more complete picture of what he wore and provide a tactile experience about Jack as a person. Because the runaway advertisement noted some specific physical characteristics, including estimated age, approximate height, and that one of his legs was larger than the other, we opted to stay as true to those elements and the clothing described rather than produce clothing to fit a specific male model.

(To be concluded in our next issue.)

# KIDS' FUN PAGE

## THE COUSINS PETER AND BENJAMIN



Introducing the cousins Peter and Benjamin from our KIDS' PAGE creator, Pat Mc Donnell.

After a long journey from England, Benjamin Bunny arrived at the home of his American cousin, Peter Cottontail Wentz. They were planning on having a wonderful visit. Benjamin's first wish was to see the famous Wentz garden Peter had written about. Next, he wanted to meet Mrs. Armstrong and the other garden keepers as well as his other cousins. All during the trip Benjamin kept thinking about eating in a garden without being afraid of being chased by a mean, old farmer.

Soon after greeting each other, the two cousins walked together to the garden. Benjamin could hardly wait to see the garden, so he ran ahead of Peter...and couldn't believe there were so many tasty veggies waiting to be eaten by a hungry bunny! Benjamin started to eat, and he ate and ate. Peter stood by looking amazed and thought Benjamin ate too much and too fast. Peter couldn't say a word against this because Benjamin was his guest and he, Peter, as a Wentz rabbit, was polite and had good manners.

Finally, Benjamin stopped eating; he cried out that his tummy ached and he felt very sick. Peter told him not to worry; Mrs. Armstrong would help. Mrs. Armstrong gave him a nice cup of chamomile tea, put him to bed with a warm cover, and told him he'd be fine in the morning. She also told him to eat properly and left him with a smile and a hug.

The next morning all was well, and Peter and Benjamin had a great, wonderful, fun visit.

P. S. Benjamin ate in the garden every day properly; no more tummy aches.

### Garden plants word puzzle

C	A	C	A	P	U	N	Q	N	E	S	E	A	S
E	I	C	E	A	E	C	S	N	M	E	S	S	A
S	E	H	S	L	D	A	T	I	U	L	L	I	D
L	E	N	E	G	E	N	S	C	M	E	A	H	N
E	L	B	D	A	O	S	H	S	A	U	Q	S	S
E	G	A	B	B	A	C	N	E	E	G	I	N	N
T	N	L	T	T	O	M	A	T	O	E	S	A	A
T	A	A	T	A	A	T	E	L	R	G	C	E	E
L	P	E	R	C	E	P	E	L	T	N	I	M	B
N	E	L	E	T	T	U	C	E	S	I	R	T	N
R	R	O	I	O	N	I	O	A	C	E	A	R	E
T	E	S	T	O	R	R	A	C	S	T	A	S	E
R	A	E	R	A	D	I	S	H	E	S	H	A	R
R	E	O	O	L	P	A	R	S	L	E	Y	A	G

TOMATOES  
CABBAGE  
RADISHES  
LETTUCES  
PARSLEY  
SQUASH  
DILL  
CARROTS  
GREEN BEANS  
MINT