

A Drive Back in Time

One family shares some history upon their return to Pennsylvania Dutch Country to retrace their roots.

BY CAROLE JACOBS

The Quakers claim Philadelphia, and the Amish own Lancaster County. But the other Pennsylvania Dutch Country — that landscape of gentle hills in Upper Bucks County that bleeds

into the Poconos — that's ours.

By "ours," I mean the Pennsylvania Dutch on my mother's side, a Mennonite clan dating back to the 1720s. On one of William Penn's journeys from England during the late 17th century toward what would become New Jersey and Pennsylvania, my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Moyer went along. Upon landing, he followed an Indian game trail 30 miles west to the future site of Perkasie, the small town where my mother and her 10 siblings were born several generations later. He and his industrious ancestors carved farms from the rocky soil and built sturdy stone churches, one-room schoolhouses, and covered bridges that stand to this day.

Not long ago, with housing developments devouring farmland at an alarming rate, my cousin Joann, who still lives in the region, decided to start researching our family tree before suburbia erased all traces. For the past seven years, Joann, a psychiatric nurse in sensible shoes, has spent her free time circling tombstones, a camera in one hand and a copy of *The World Book of (Your Family's Name Here)* in the other.

I was aware of Joann's digging, but as a Los Angeles-based transplant I was too busy navigat-



Mom Barbara (left) and one of her ten sisters play instruments at their childhood home in Perkasie.

ing the present to plumb the past. The only roots in my life were the ones that required a monthly touch-up.

Then I turned 50. With my family far away and no children of my own to carry on my name, I sensed impending extinction. Suddenly I couldn't suck roots fast enough. Joann offered to devise a scenic drive to showcase our lineage. Mom, while no history buff, was thrilled at the idea (anything to get me home for a weekend), while Jeanie, my kid sister, thought it would be great fun to get the dirt on what we two had always regarded as the Goody Two-shoes side of the family. (My father's family is from Sicily — branches of the family tree that we agreed were better left unshaken).

Joann, Jeanie, Mom, and I met a month later at Joann's place. After reviewing the route (many of the villages were so small we needed a magnifying glass to find them), we piled in the car and began to wind through a patchwork quilt of colonial towns, moo-cow meadows, and rolling cornfields to Wrightstown, site of the Lenni Lenape Indian Walking Purchase Monument of 1737.

The Lenape tribe traded land through these so-called walking purchases, which meant our ancestors could lay claim to as much land as they could walk in a day. Alas, one of our ancestors figured he could get more land if he ran. The Indians were outraged. While records are vague, apparently our ancestor never lived to finish his run. Joann said that after that episode, Indians never again trusted the white man — and the rest is history.

Mom's face fell when we pulled up to her childhood home in Perkasio. The grand gabled Victorian had fallen on hard times and was now a tumble-down boardinghouse. A derelict sofa slouched on the ransacked front porch. "Here's where they posted the measles quarantine sign," Mom murmured as she fingered a rotting porch column.

Further along, we passed the farmstead of Grandfather Moyer. To Mom's delight (and our relief), the farmhouse had been carefully restored and the "beloved acre of woods" that he had requested in his will never to be cut down was still standing.

At St. Peter's United Church of Christ in nearby Tohickon (where our relatives are resting in

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peace), we wondered why the beautiful stone church had two front doors. Joann explained that two small congregations, each too poor to build its own church, agreed to build and share this one. Because they constantly bickered, they built two doors to keep the peace, which worked fine until two of our ancestors rom

opposing factions decided to marry. Then no one knew which door to use and all hell broke loose.

From Tohickon, we drove to the pretty village of Blooming Glen to meet our rich Moyer relations of Philadelphia Scrapple fame. As kids, we loved the slab-style mystery-meat sausage (as well as the slogan that it's made with "everything except the oink").

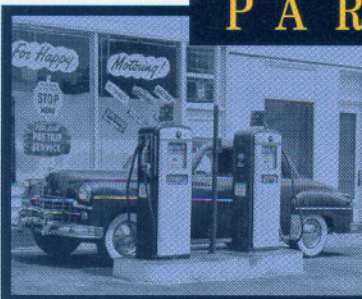
As we dug into shoofly pie at Emil's Restaurant in Perkasio, an old-time eatery specializing in Pennsylvania Dutch fare, Joann gave us our last history class for the tour. It was September 1777, and the British were marching on Philadelphia. Our forefathers, fearing the enemy would steal the Liberty Bell and melt it down for bullets, loaded the bell onto a farm wagon owned by one of our ancestors, who transported the bell to Allentown and buried it under the floor of the Zion Reformed Church for safe-keeping.

"Oh, my word," said my mother. "Is that how it got cracked?"

"No, Mom," said Jeanie, trying to keep a straight face. "That was another trip." ☹

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