THE citizens of Pennsylvania German communities were not unlike other Americans in their desire to provide by will for the loved ones remaining behind. In order to illustrate the characteristics of the typical Pennsylvania German will, the present writer turned to the records of Snyder and Union counties, for there, in a section today still predominantly agricultural, lay a closeness to mother earth and therefore to the struggle for existence.

Examination of the recorded wills and testaments in Snyder and Union counties revealed the general simplicity of life in the last century, a history of social customs, the hard struggle for the necessities of life, and an effort to continue to provide them for the closest kin. For this paper, greatest attention was given to the wills recorded at Middleburg (Snyder county) in volume one, covering approximately the period from 1855 to 1871, and to those recorded at Lewisburg (Union county) in Volume A, in the first half of the nineteenth century; that is, before 1855 when Snyder county was carved out of Union county.

A comparison of these older wills with those of a later period and even of the present day brought into bold relief changes in values, in cost of living, and in the concern for what seems to us today but ordinary and trivial. Truly, one may paraphrase "there is gold in dem dere hills" with "there is history in dem dere wills," the history largely of Pennsylvania Germans, who showed consideration for the family in their detailed and often quaint enumerations.

Wills are a reflection of the period from which they sprang, in that they named and specified the articles peculiar to that period. The earlier wills, those recorded in Union county in the first half of the nineteenth century, mentioned the dough tray, bread baskets, flax, hackled flax and tow, the bucking tub, pounds and shillings, the ten-plated stove, leather for the making of shoes at
home, the spinning wheel, and the loom with its gears. In several
the husband even provided for the sowing of flax land for his
widow. It should be noted here that hackled flax, frequently
willed to the widow, refers to flax which has been combed out
with the hackle, swingle, or hatchel, a toothed instrument for
separating the flax into the long fiber for fine linens and into
the tow with the short and coarse fiber for making coarse linen
and twines. The bucking tub or *Bauchzwanzwer*, which received
occasional mention, was used for bleaching linen cloth or for
pickling meat. Coffee, spices, salt, and sugar, the few necessities
the farmer could not produce and for which he had to go to the
town or city perhaps once a year, were often included in the
early wills.

Let us now look at a few typical examples taken from the
wills found in the Union county records. One husband bequeathed
to his wife (1813, p. 3) “a right in the garden; further she shall
have a right and privilege to keep of my household and kitchen
furniture, beds and bedsteads, and of my flax as much as she
thinks proper . . . my said son Daniel is to keep one cow in the
pasture, and in winter to feed the same with the cattle, for my
said beloved wife and give her annually ten bushels of wheat and
ten bushels of bookwheat [*Buchwecze*] during her lifetime.”

Another stated (1814, p. 16):

\[
\ldots\text{my sons John and Henry shall during her natural life give her my said wife each and every year 10 bushels of wheat and 5 bushels of rye and 5 bushels of buckwheat and 5 bushels of corn and 12 bushels of clean hatchled flax and 6 pounds good and clean tow and 100 pounds of pork and 25 pounds of beef and as much salt sugar coffee peper alspric jinger and as such necessaries for life and also 5 pounds of wool and also firewood cut small at the door fit for to put in the stove and also two pair of shoes yearly and every year as aforesaid.}
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According to an 1816 will, p. 108, the wife was to receive
“one good bed bedstead all her clothes the stove that now stands

\[1\] These wills are recorded at Lewisburg in volume A. Throughout this paper, the numbers given in the text will refer to the year in which the will was originally written (but not recorded) and to the page on which the part quoted is recorded.
in the house one washing tub one iron pot one cow one sheep
one swine one table one spinning wheel two water buckets my
dreser and dishes & spoons & knives forks also all the flax, toe
tow, wool & cloth, that may be mine at the time of my death . . .” A later will (1818, p. 116) was very similar in its variety
of articles for the wife: “one cow two sheep one bed and bed-
stead one chist one table two winser chairs one copper kettle four
iron pots prying [frying] pan one tea kettle one pail three cups
and sausers one coffe pot half dozen spoons three petter plates
four knives and forks swine one bucking tub.” Imagine the pre-
dicament of a fourth guest having to enjoy his meal without the
use of a pewter plate, a cup, and a saucer.

Now we come to one who willed some possessions mainly to
the family as a unit (1821, p. 153). “The chest table and chairs
and spinning wheels all to remain unsold for the use of the famely
and thirty gallon of whisky to be kept for the use of the famely,
the loom with all the implements belonging thereto, shall remain
for the use as above said.” The same writer willed the “ten
plated stove to wife with necessary pipe,” and provided (p. 154)
that “all my books shall remain unsold and shall be for the use
of my famely.” Here was a family that could mix its drinks
with books and spinning wheels near a ten-plated stove.

The weaving of cloth and linen held an important place in
the early home. The words “loom, spinning wheel and reel”
(1816, p. 66) made these articles the property of the widow.
Moreover, this same will provided for the sowing of one quarter
of flax for the wife, and gave her “yearly one bushel of salt
one half pound of pepper. one half pound of alspice and letter
[sic] for two pair of shoes.” Another will (1822, p. 163) read:
“She [the wife] shall have yearly a quater [sic] of flax land sown
on my plantation, and to be broke and swungle by the person
whom I shall give and bequeath my plantation.” And (p. 164)
“my son . . . shall weave one piece of linen (flaxen) yearly
gratis, during her widowhood.”

One will (1822, p. 175 f.) gave the wife “two beds & bed-
stead two iron pots my three chests and that is in them (Except
my own cloths) my clock, my kitchen dresser & all the furniture
in and on it two washing tubs, one churn, as many earthen pots
as she wants for her own use two prying pons [frying pans]
one dough trough, and bread baskets, six bags, one spinning
wheel & reel, one prayer & Psalm book one stove & pipe two
hand baskets, one table, four chairs, one coffee pot, one looking
glass & half dozen knives & forks.” While the coffee mill, the
washing tub, the meat tub, tinware, and “the vinegar with the
cag [keg]” seemed important to one husband to mention (1822,
p. 168), for another, Matthias App, a Selinsgrover, they held
no virtues, for he gave his wife (1828, p. 297) his gray mare,
his gig, and his largest Dearborn wagon, a silver watch to his
son, and a shotgun to his grandson. In an 1823 will (p. 216),
three brass ladles and one cake shovel were prizes for the widow,
and in the same year (p. 219) “one pair of stillyards.”

A will of 1825 (p. 257) contained the wish of a husband who
really must have had a genuinely warm spot in his heart for his
wife when he ordered that she should have two rooms in the
house, and that the two sons “have to put a new stove and pipe
and clean the pipe when necessary during her lifetime.” After her
death, of course, the stove became their property. Another father
was concerned (1815, p. 45) that his sons learn a trade of their
own choosing. One almost comes to the conclusion that the closest
relatives are one’s worst enemies when one reads this provision
(1821, p. 156): To a cousin is willed the sum of $50, but to
a sister “one shilling that is to say 13c,” and to a brother thirteen
cents.

Now we have come to some change in the subject, namely, the
later testaments. In the wills recorded at Middleburg (Snyder
county) in the second half of the nineteenth century, some of the
property peculiar to an earlier day was no longer mentioned. Of
the articles characteristic of the earlier period, only the shilling,
the dough tray, and the weaver’s loom bore an occasional repeti-
tion. But one found here the same emphasis upon the necessities
of life and the same incongruous enumerations or listings with no
apparent relationship to one another. The bed and bedstead for
sleeping, sustenance in the form of grain, fresh fruit, or dried
fruit, good cider and water cider, firewood and stoves for warmth
and cooking, livestock for meat and feed for livestock, household
furniture and kitchen utensils, various rights and privileges granted
to the widow, carpeting and bedding, wool and linens, the horse
and buggy—all these and others were grouped together promi-
scuously in many wills.

This conglomerate content was in no way aided by the frequent
use of the period for the comma and the more general lack of any
punctuation at all. The signature with the mark or the letter x
in about a third or more of the wills indicated the percentage of
those who could not write. Whether the failure to capitalize the
word “I” might be indicative of the characteristic humility of the
Pennsylvania Germans who wrote most of these wills is hard to
tell.

It may be necessary to point out definite evidence besides the
names that the writers of the wills were, on the whole, Pennsyl-
vania Germans. Here are but a few indications of the influence
of the Pennsylvania German dialect. Typical are the interchange
of voiceless and voiced consonants in prewning tup for brewing
tub, buplick for public, bick rocken chair for big rocking chair,
neets for needs, try apples for dry apples, and bonneds for bon-
nets; also the interchange of labials in prying for frying and in
prying pouns for frying pans; the confusion of j and ch in joice
for choice; the use of freind for friend, of bookwuheat for buck-
wheat from a literal translation of Buchwezeec, of fleshfork for
meat fork from the cognate Fleeschgawwel, of therecut for out
of it from daraus, of chist for chest from Kischt; and the literal
translation of “der Mann os uff em Blatz wuhnt” into “the man
that lives on the place.”

The question of rights and privileges for the widow is an
interesting one. In many cases the farm was willed to the eldest
son, who in turn had to assume the responsibility of helping his
mother. If the son received the home and farm but the mother
was to share the property with him, a misunderstanding could
easily have arisen. Against such an emergency, the writer of the
will protected his widow by an insistence upon specifically stated
privileges for her. Perhaps it was the right to go into the spring
house, or to go into the orchard to get apples for drying into
Schnitz, or to use other fruits for drying, or to cut firewood from
the woodland, or to use ground for a garden, or to use the pump
and milk house, or to kill “a foul [sic] for her own use when
she pleases,” or to have “one dozen hens and one ruster [sic],”
or “to have a share of the currens [sic] in lower part of garden,”
or to "occupy the new part of the house in which we now live and also to have free passage to go through the other part of the house to get upstairs."

Let us now take some excerpts from wills to illustrate the question of rights and privileges for the widow. A rather peculiar privilege was recorded in an 1858 will, p. 65: "It is my will that my wife Mary shall live in the house we now live in and shall have the use of one half of the garden, one half of the cellar, right to the spring house, right to the bake oven, privilege in the pig sty." There were several rights, but just one privilege: "privilege in the pig sty." All this meant was the right the widow obtained to use the pig sty for her own pigs just as her son used it for his own.

And now parts of what one may choose to call the "as she may want" will (1857, p. 122):

...and my tenant shall keep for her one cow & two hogs, and to find the feed and pasture for said cow and to furnish stable room for said cow, and leave her two hogs run in the fields with his own, one third of the garden to be for the use of my said widow, to have room in the spring house, and in the wash house as much as she may want, and the tenant to furnish her with as much cider and apples as she may want for her own use, and the said tenant to give her as much potatoe ground as she may want and to give her room in the smoke house & bake oven as she may want.

A will of 1853 (p. 133) gave the wife the right to occupy the house as long as she lived. She "shall have the exclusive right in that part called the 'store room,'" along with rights in the garden, cellar, kitchen, and springhouse. She was given room in the stables for her cow and sheep, two hogs "on the place to run in the fields where the hogs of the occupyer of the land runs," the right to fruit, two barrels of cider, apples for apple butter yearly during life, and the right to keep ten or a dozen fowl. An axe and a garden hoe were also listed.

... it is my will [1859, p. 136] and desire that my wife Rebecca shall have the use and occupy the one half of the new house as long as she lives or remains my widow that is the end next to the old house she is to have the priviledg from the seller to the garret she shall have the priviledg in the spring house and smoke house to have
The widow, however, received not only so-called rights and privileges, but also definite property and provisions. If it was a horse, a cow, a pig, or a sheep, then the oldest son or several sons had to provide the feed for the livestock, and even do the feeding. "I will [1860, p. 111] that my son Henry shall keep two cows for my wife, find the pasture and hay, and feed them together with his own cows . . . the hogs which are to be fattened for next winter, shall be used in common by my wife Sarah and my son Henry." According to another will (1854, p. 161), the wife was to have two milk cows, "and they are to run with their cows [those of the two sons] in pasture all summer and have room in the stable with their cows and feed & litter them well with straw and keep the stable clean." (1867, p. 288): "She shall also have one of my little bulls with feed to fatten at this fall." Usually the wife had the right to select the particular animal or animals according to the number specified in the will. In this connection, the phrase, "of her own choosing," occurred frequently.

Wills revealed the interest in the horse and buggy, the means of transportation. In one instance, a colt was bequeathed to the oldest son, a buggy to the wife as long as she remained a widow, and a bay mare two years old to another son. Another will read: "I give to my son Henry a black horse 6 years old in place of his colt which shall belong to my estate . . . to my beloved wife my Rock-away, together with the harness belonging to it." Another man willed the sorrel mare to his wife. One may say that the choice lay with the wife in the case of other animals, but the husband specified the particular horse.

We have noted how the husband provided a home for his widow, how he saw to it that the son kept the livestock and fed it for her, how he ordered that she should have certain rights to use what was considered common property. But he provided further for her comfort by making it obligatory for the son to find

her meat smoked and also free course to the spring for water and also in the bake oven to bake her bread and room in the garden for her own use . . . and if my widow wants to keep a cow the man that lives on the place is to give her room in the barn and to give her hay to feed the cow and my executors is to pay the man for his troubel out of my widows thirds . . .
and cut the firewood in satisfactory amount, in correct size and length for the stove. (1860, p. 111): “I order that my son... shall cut all the wood my wife may need or want, haul it to the wood pile, make it fine and ready for use.” An earlier will (1856, p. 143) had a proviso that the firewood be cut and delivered by the two sons right to the stove.

All kinds of grain were allotted to the widow. Someone was generally given the responsibility of taking the grain to the grist mill to be ground and of returning the flour to the widow. The son who received the farm (1866, p. 270) had to “take her grain to the mill and bring the flour [sic] or grist home to her house.” “It is my will [1856, p. 24] that my son Conrad shall farm the place and shall give of all he raises on the farm as wheat, rye, corn, oats, buckwheat and potatoes the one half to my beloved wife Catharine (hay and straw excepted) and that my wife shall have the privileges to keep two cows and one head of cattle for a winter beef on the farm.” One farmer (1858, p. 55) bequeathed to his wife “1 cow and 2 hogs, and two years the grain for bread for her and for my children, and pork from one hog, and all the beef...” Another (1859, p. 85) arranged to have given to his wife “the one fourth bushel of all manner of grain, raised on my farm for her support and living such as wheat, rye, oats, corn, buckwheat and potatoes so long as God may spare her life, also the one half of all the hay made on the farm.” Very common was the wish that the widow get the third part of all kinds of grain produced annually (see, for example, 1859, p. 146). In another will (1864, p. 221), the right of two sons to live on the farm was directly dependent upon their giving one third of the produce annually to the widow. One husband even foresaw the possibility that not enough grain could be raised on the homestead lot, and empowered his executors to assist the wife.

In addition to provisions for meats, milk, fruits, potatoes, and grain, now and then money was included for the wife. Obviously, with general and specific stipulations for sustenance and some clothes, not much money was needed in order to live simply but nevertheless comfortably and happily. In one will, the son was ordered to pay his mother $60 each year. In another, the wife received the $80 in gold in the house, as well as all the milk and butter money she could make or take in till April 1, 1862, about
a half year. In a third, $200 were invested at interest for help to the wife. The phrase, “in lieu of the $300 now set aside by law for a widow” (1867, p. 286), apparently indicated the husband’s financial obligation by law.

Here is an example of a weird mixture, with several dollars tagged on (1856, p. 143). Here was property for the wife:

fruit, pasture and stable and hay for one cow, hog right in two spring houses to put her milk in, stable room for hog, space in two gardens, . . . wheat and flour, corn, potatoes, bookwheat [literal translation of Buchweezel] flour, eggs, winter apples, cyder, applebutter, fifty pounds of beef in killing time, coffee, sugar, molasses, salt, fish, two frocks, two pair of shoes, two pair of stockings, two herikerchiefs [hand-], nine yards of good muslin, bonnets [bonnets] of her own choosing, also four dollars.

There were several cases where provisions were made to build or purchase a house for the widow, with the charges against the estate. In one, the executors were instructed to purchase a house and lot in the town of Freeburg (Snyder county) where the wife resided, if she could not live peaceably with her son. Another ordered the son (1860, p. 111) to “build a convenient and comfortable house in addition and close to the house which I now occupy, twenty feet long in front, as wide as the house I now live in and two stories high, for my wife Sarah.”

In several instances, further expenditure of money for the widow was demanded in case of illness, by a request for a good physician. Then too, one daughter (1858, p. 80) “shall have $50 more than any of the others provided she continues to wait on and take care of my said wife till her death.” Executors of another will (1865, p. 256) were told “to keep a girl” to do the house work if the wife needed one.

All the detail and exactness in the directions for property disposal to the wife point suspiciously, in the opinion of the present writer, to the influence of the “echt deutsche Hausfrau” and to her insistence upon certain considerations in her role behind the throne, her home.

Thus far we have stressed largely what was willed to the wife or widow. Certainly she was not the sole recipient of property, as we have already indicated when we said that usually the farm
itself was given or sold to the oldest son, who had the obligation of taking care of his mother. But generally the son had other obligations, too; in fact, he frequently had the added obligation of partly taking care of his brothers and sisters financially, and in this way he really paid for the farm. Let us take a few cases. William, the oldest son, received the farm (1859, p. 146). After the death of the widow, William was ordered in his father's will to give $400 to each of his six brothers and sisters in successive years, beginning with the first, one year after the death of his mother. William actually paid $2,400 for the farm. The oldest son (1860, p. 111) was granted the privilege of buying the farm at the appraisement price after the death of the mother. The father's will stipulated that if the son accepted the farm he had to pay equal shares to his brothers and sisters one year after the mother's death. If the son refused, the executors were authorized to sell the farm elsewhere. For the real estate (1861, p. 241), the will stated that the son had to pay each of three children $1,000 within one year of the death of the writer. A $3,000 property! Joseph, the oldest son (1864, p. 225), was willed all the real estate. Five years after his father's death, Joseph had to pay $500 to his youngest brother, six years $500 to Samuel, seven years $500 to sister Abigail (married), and eight years $500 to sister Susanna (married). Nine years after his father's death, Joseph had to pay a second $500 to his youngest brother, and so on, into the twelfth year after his father's death. In other words, each of the four children received $1,000. A $4,000 property! Besides this, the same son had to build a house for his mother—and take care of her. But he did get one horse, eight sheep, and a clock. This same will stipulated that one of the sons should get nothing but a cancelled note of $300, with the brusque statement of finality: "This shall be the whole of his inheritance for reasons satisfactory to myself."

The daughters were not forgotten from the financial and other points of view (1858, p. 118): "... my daughter Elisabeth has received seventy five dollars from me as their inheritance as her whole shear and therefore she has nothing more to gid as an inherident after my deceas. ..." In another will, each of three daughters was given $33.33 and a cow. In another family, each daughter received "one cow or the price of a cow." By another
will, two daughters inherited the “cooking stove with all the fixings . . . and the weaver’s loom and all the gears and fixings belonging to the same.” Because of her father’s will, a daughter now owned “one bureau one dotra [dough tray] one cooking stove and fifteen dollars for queensware knife & forks spoons and tinware. . . .” A wedding gift by will? Yes, “. . . to each of my daughters who are single yet, shall be given out of my estate, one table, ½ dozen chairs, one buraw [sic], one cow, 2 hogs, two sheep, one bedstead and bedding at the time when they shall enter the state of matrimony.” A birthday gift by will? Yes, “that my sons aforesaid shall have one more separate cow between them, which cow they shall keep until Elen my daughter attains the age of eighteen years.”

The entire feminine sex—wives, sisters, and daughters—was remembered with table linens, quilts, sheets, towels, pillow slips, oil cloth, sea shell boxes, sofas, wearing apparel, blankets, silverware (tablespoons, teaspoons, salt spoons, sugar spoons), cane bottom chairs and rockers, glassware, queensware, wash stand with pitcher and basin, churns, wash tubs, wing tables, iron and copper kettles, and “all the wool of this year’s shearing.”

Several interesting examples must be cited here in which the sons were the recipients. (1867, p. 314) “I give and bequeath unto my two sons . . . (each of them) two horses and a full set of horse gears (Each one wagon & box each one plow, & harrow & doubletrees, also each one cow, four hogs, four sheep also each a set of hayladders. . . .” These sons had to keep the fences in repair, a stipulation found in various wills. They were allowed to make rails and to bring coal on the premises sufficient to burn one thousand bushels of lime. In several wills there were provisions to lime the fields. This will (1867) contained the strange demand: “I do order that all the meat tallow and lard, shall be used, and consumed by my present family.” In a will registered in 1860, p. 105, the son received the father’s professional library, surgical instruments, medicines, and all other shop furniture. (1853, p. 308) “It is my will that my library belonging to my profession and instruments should not be sold, but the same be kept for the use of one or more of my sons if they or any one of them should study and practice medicine but in case none of my sons should study and practice medicine, in that event I direct
the same to be sold to the best advantage." This doctor also expressed the desire that his children be educated. In several wills, money for rearing and educating the children was provided.

Of interest to fishermen is this excerpt (1870, p. 377): "I give and bequeath to my son J. W. Gaugler, my shad fisheries in the Susquehanna River (together with any seines and fixtures thereunto belonging, he yielding and paying the tenth of the shad and salmon he may realize or catch in said fisheries, unto my wife Margaret during her life." Of interest to county and church treasurers is the will of Frederick Hawger (Lewisburg, vol. A, 1815, p. 30), who gave $100 to each of the county treasuries, Union, Columbia, and Northumberland, as well as $400 "to the Lutheran congregation in Selinsgrove."

One must mention the element of humor, although there would hardly be a conscious attempt at it in a will. But would you associate cows and books? What strange bedfellows in the duo: "also such of the cows as she may wish to keep & my library of miscellaneous works. . . ." "She shall have two rooms in the house in which I now dwell and a part in the cellar with passage thereto, two beds in the garden hay and pasture for three cows, . . ." "I will that the horse power and wind mill which I own, shall remain at my barn, till after the death of my wife. . . ." "I do order that my thrashing machine shall remain in the barn as long as my beloved wife Molly shall live."

There was to be no fooling about a will, not even any contesting of it. "If any of the children disputes the will by a law-suit, he or she shall have five dollars, and no more—balance to be paid to his or her heirs." "Any child attempting to set aside the will shall be disinherited and shall only receive one shilling as a reward for their folly. . . ."

What about costs and values as revealed in these wills? In 1857, "... my will is that my son . . . shall have twenty acres of the land whereon I now live at the rate of fifteen dollars per acre. . . ." In 1860, "I sell to my son Henry, the little bay mare, one two horse wagon together with the box and the ladders, harness for two horses, one two horse sled, one plow, one harrow and one cultivator for the sum of one hundred and forty five dollars, and order that he pay the said sum, forty five dollars five years after my death, fifty dollars six years after my death, and fifty
dollars seven years after my death to my executor . . . and all this without interest.” Each son shall have the following outfit (1864): “one two horse waggon, at $50 . . . 1 horse at $100 or $110 harness for two horses at lowest price 1 plow 1 harrow wheat till harvest for bread about one hog or pork of same three sheep one saddle & bridle for $7 or $8. . . .” Also in 1864 was the direction: “I give to my son Joseph two waggons two ploughs two harrows my horse grain drill and shay for the sum of $187.”

In 1823, according to a will, the price of one rifle was $14.50.

It is human nature to wish that generations might remember one—hence the desire for a tombstone. In two wills of the year 1862, the cost of the satisfaction of that desire was mentioned, for in one a tombstone for the value of $15 was to be bought, and in the other the executors were to purchase “a pair of grave-stones . . . for the value of $15.”

Because the Pennsylvania German dislikes debts and because he knew that debts would have to be paid before the validity of the terms of the will, he was careful to include the usual direction to pay all debts and even funeral expenses. With this direction was found the wish that God would take the soul “home to his eternal abode.” And so, may this paper close with the beginning to which we must all return: “I command [sic] my soul into the hands of God who gave it, and my body to the earth to be buried in a decent and Christian like manner. . . .”