FUNCTIONAL FOLKLORE: THE SPRINGS, PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

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Sequestered in verdure, at an abrupt curve on a southern Pennsylvania mountain road stands the Springs Historical Society Museum. The building seems as indigenous, as natural in its environment, as its contents are: no town surrounds it, no highway passes it, no billboard announces it. Indeed only a farmhouse, a "silent sea of pines," and a pasture mottled with livestock and mountain stone are within view. The setting is appropriate since the museum exhibits the implements and appurtenances used in the work of the mountain people who lived (and whose progeny for the most part still live) on the diverse slopes and in the shaded valleys of the area. The building itself, in fact, was once an instrument vital in their occupations as it served as the local slaughterhouse and butcher shop.

Actually established in 1958, the museum was first conceived of in 1934 by the present executive director, Dr. Alta Schrock. Dr. Schrock is a descendant of one of the aboriginal settlers in the Casselman River Valley, the Anabaptist Joel B. Miller. Her deep roots and personal residence have given her an intimate knowledge of the history, the work, and the abilities of her people and the mountaineers in general. These inhabitants had always been farmers and craftsmen, and because of religious tenets and isolation they were slow to adopt modern agricultural methods and to submit to mass production. Until this generation, workhorses dotted many fields while in the houses looms were tightly strung and wood-carving knives hung with glittering edge. Over the modern highways, however, came mechanized equipment, products which could be had for dollars instead of laborious effort, and fresh ideas which attracted the young. The old ways began to fade, and with them heirlooms—reminders of the past—were relegated to attics, cellars, and barns; some vanished altogether. Dr. Schrock, periodically interviewing many of the residents with a view to writing several books on the history of the local Amish people, realized that the more valuable

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of these relics had to be gathered and secured in a museum or they would all be lost. While she was recording conversations with informants, she began also to note what relics, what treasures of Amish history, they possessed. And as her card file expanded, so grew her concern about the artifacts.

In early 1957 Dr. Schrock expressed her fears to her cousin Ernest Miller, who immediately understood the need and offered his basement game room as a rudimentary museum. Four other descendants of Joel Miller quickly joined forces to assist these two visionaries, and at a meeting on August 10 the Miller Museum was born. For seven days the devoted heirs collected and took to Ernest Miller's game room historical items; at the end of the week, not to their surprise but perhaps to ours, they had procured from the area between Bittinger, Maryland, and Berlin, Pennsylvania, 175 valuable pieces. Moreover, by the first public meeting on 22 August, the number of interested people had more than sextupled, reaching some forty. Because of this phenomenal growth, the restriction to handiwork of the Miller clan was dropped; it was decided that the collection should represent the entire valley. Enthusiasm at the meeting was so intense that a second one had to be called for the following evening to complete the business.

The high spirits of these founders infected even more people, and the Springs Historical Society was quickly created; when it incorporated that fall, the charter members numbered 335 and lived as far west as Indiana and Michigan. Three foreign countries were also represented. By December a second large undertaking was scheduled, a fall Folk Festival, co-sponsored by Penn Alps, Inc.—a non-profit organization founded to reactivate the native crafts of the Amish and the mountaineers. On 11 October 1958 the first of these annual fetes was held, and despite a modicum of publicity over 2000 people attended. Four of these festivals have now taken place, each attracting about 2000 more people than the preceding one. Native crafts and old Amish and mountain life are the features of these celebrations: ancient men split rails, mold glowing horseshoes over blacksmith fires, carve delicate objects from hard wood and seeds. Tasty cider flows from a primitive press and apple butter is stirred in huge kettles. Women are at work spinning and weaving, painting, cooking. Mountain music cuts the air, and the colors of Amish dress punctuate the milling crowd.

A few months prior to the first festival, the society's museum
collection had outgrown its basement quarters, and a move was in order. Happily, the building that housed the slaughterhouse had come vacant and was made available to the society at nominal rent. The building, though small, contains six rooms, and the men of the organization were permitted to build an addition along one side, which gives exhibit space to some of the larger items. It is here that the museum is located today.

The structure, of course, is a humble one. There are no parquet floors, no pastel paints, no elegant show cases. Illumination is provided by a few floodlights and, otherwise, bare incandescent bulbs; the ceiling consists of uncovered skeletal beams and the roof material; the interior walls are made of the same tiles that form the exterior. But these rugged accommodations, rather than appearing harsh and unfinished, offer a desirable setting for the rude contents. The primitiveness, the "homemade" character of the building, the very lack of decoration and sophisticated touch instil vitality in the implements displayed. One expects to come upon an old mountain carpenter smoothing a board with his crude plane and would not be astonished to discover his wife breaking flax while a kettle of apple butter steams nearby.

The entrance room, the largest of the seven, holds the general collection, which comprises all objects not belonging in the specialty rooms. It is an interesting room to step into: to the left one notices among the numerous items some kitchen utensils, a few irons, a board of peach seed carvings, a long table on which stand examples of early pottery and above which are suspended assorted lanterns—a complete history of local lighting, in fact. Directly to the right stands an old schoolmaster's desk, an extraordinary straw beehive (1840), and on the window ledge the first telephone used in Meyersdale, Pennsylvania. Along the right wall an original set of Currier & Ives prints hangs above an early Amish church bench, the start of an anticipated early Amish church room. Several china closets toward the far end of the room contain dishes brought from Germany by the first settlers, pewter, and even a series of blood-letting cups in graduated sizes. The room is divided by some furniture made by early local craftsmen, and on one table two old Amish hymnals catch the eye. A stroll through this area initiates one into the history of the valley and prepares him for the study in detail which the specialty rooms afford.

The first of these rooms, the Bedroom, is quite small, offering
just enough space for a double bed, a child’s bed, a cradle, a play cradle (all handmade), and a Howe sewing machine patented in 1840. Several early handmade quilts are exhibited on the beds, and a few old photos and paintings add color to the rough walls. Two mid-nineteenth century Amish hats in the room form the beginnings of a proposed collection of a history of local costume.

At the back of the little building is the Pioneer Trades Room. Here in display cases and on wooden benches are exhibited the tools of the early artisan: the carpenter, the cobbler, the cooper, the blacksmith, the tanner. While the sets as yet are incomplete, the variety and number of the instruments are encompassing enough to give one a rather accurate conception of the tools available in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (The directors aspire to set up a replica blacksmith shop on the site of an old shop on Route 40 and have a smith actually working in it.)

The desire to reproduce for modern eyes the ancient, native methods of work is strong in these people, and does not just manifest itself in collections of implements, in the festival, in plans and dreams, for in the Spinning and Weaving Room, the central area of the museum, the treasured implements are actively operated by a few of the local women who still possess the necessary skills. Here one can see all the equipment used in processing flax from field to woven cloth as well as the complete story of wool processing. But more than that, one sees flax broken before him on one of the two rare flax brakes; he sees the thread spun, the weaving accomplished. Even rugs of intricate designs are woven here on the second oldest handmade rug-weaving loom of the area. The room, windowless and inadequately lighted, seems to exude darkness, and to step forward into it and discern in the gloom women dressed in their antique costumes and working at the gigantic old looms, the brakes, and the spinning wheels is to step back a century. A moment of man’s time is held here among these shadows, and for a few minutes at least one can, as if at first hand, observe the life it in turn contains.

A small, awkwardly shaped room serves as the Maple Sugar Camp. In it are buckets and troughs used in gathering the maple sap (including a hand-hollowed half cucumber log, one of the earliest sap gathering vessels) and large kettles for cooking and paddles for stirring apple butter. Some of these utensils, too, still find use at the folk festival each year.

Between this room and the front of the building is the combination
Butcher Shop and Washroom. Besides the expected articles are a collection of grocer's spice boxes, a 206-year-old sausage grinder with repairs made by succeeding generations which show something of the development of both the wooden and the steel nail, a sausage peeler and a sausage stuffer from the home of Nancy Hanks, Abraham Lincoln's mother, and a rare baker's peel.

The last room is the large one formed by the annex to the building, The Barn. With an appropriate earth floor and wooden walls, this room exhibits a diversity of items including a Conestoga Wagon finished in 1822 (the lumber was cut for it in 1813), a revamped two-horse treadmill utilized for grinding and thrashing grain (also used in the folk festival), some wood pipe and a boring auger, a few scythes, a set of slave shackles, and a number of hand-hewn troughs.

Already the museum holdings proudly number over 1000; of these only the schoolmaster's desk, a large street lamp, the spice boxes, and a few minor items were purchased from the society's funds. All the others have been donated. Dr. Schrock and the Ernest Miller family have between them given about 100 items, and, of course, Dr. Schrock is responsible for collecting many others. People now, however, are frequently initiating offers to the museum. On the day that this writer visited the museum a set of doctor's saddlebags, a fur gauntlet and muffler for a stagecoach driver, a fairly complete set of miner's equipment, a bullet-making outfit, and a pair of handmade skates were brought to Dr. Schrock as donations.

With such widespread and spontaneous enthusiasm among the local people the little museum should rapidly become substantial and increasingly valuable. Already it vividly manifests the roots of these people, and thus informs the valley with a sense of its history. The rude building is bulging with its expanding contents, and the Society hopes that funds will soon be found to accommodate them, perhaps in a more accessible location. As it is, the museum is kept solvent simply by a small admission charge (children ten cents, adults twenty-five), and its opening is seasonal (15 May—1 November, on Wednesdays 10—9 and Thursdays and Saturdays 9—5). Soon it may be moved nearer Route 40 or into the town of Springs itself, which will greatly benefit the traveler and the scholar, but never will the contents be housed in so complementary a structure.

In "The Ruines of Time" Edmund Spenser speaks of those for-
bears "Of whom no word we hear nor sign we see." The settlers of this nearby valley could easily have been completely obscured in the adumbrations of time, or at best been, in Cowper's words, "heroes little known"—romanticized figures in adulating historical fiction. But this infant museum, in its unpretentious and honest presentation, will prevent both misfortunes. Here the lives of these hardy ancestors will be firmly, and frankly, secured.

**Bibliography**

(The author wishes to thank the directors of the Society for the ready access given him to the files and records of both the Society and the museum.)

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