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What We've Been Up To

- **Class Announcement!**

- Pennsylvania Dutch 1
- You will learn the fundamentals of Pennsylvania Dutch language. This will include skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking, viewing and presenting.
- Instructor: Robert L. Schreiwier
- Bucks County Community College
- Lower Bucks Campus/\$200 (plus book) /RLANG 8102 C50
- 6 Mon & 6 Thu, 9/25 - 11/2, 6:30 - 8pm
- Zoom Option available. Please call to register for this class.
215-968-8409

NOTE: \$200 rate is the same for in-county or out-of-county residents!

- Artisans are hard at work preparing for South Jersey Pagan Pride Day!



Upcoming Events and Observances

ES ERNTFESCHT



Erntfescht, or Erntdankfescht, is the original Pennsylvania Dutch Thanksgiving. As a matter of fact, it was so ensconced in the Pennsylvania Dutch culture that there was resistance to the Yankee Thanksgiving in November. In a way, it makes a lot more sense to celebrate the harvest as it is coming in rather than two months later, when one is already having to conserve for winter.

We Urglaawer believe, though, that one can never be too thankful, so we'll happily share the bounty at both days of Thanksgiving.

Erntfescht is the Harvest Home. This event is still widely observed in Lutheran and UCC churches (likely others as well, but they are the principal 'high churches' of the Pennsylvania Dutch). This tradition precedes the conversion,

though, and echoes back to times when communities tended to the needs of their own. In Urglaawe, we do take up a food donation drive.

Erntfescht is the Second Harvest. Really, it is far more than the second because there are all sorts of crops that are harvested throughout the growing season, but this is the "official" observance of the major crops' bounties. This also is the apple harvest observance. Those who grow specialty crops (particularly herbs) may bring seeds to share or portions of their crops for trade.

Erntfescht is reaping what one has sown. This is a time for friendships, understanding, and acceptance. It is also a time to finish up any incomplete tasks related to New Year's Resolutions.

Erntfescht is the Fall Equinox. That balance of day and night is a reminder to seek harmony within ourselves - to be the placid tea in the teapot within the tempest. It is the Schpotyaahr ('late-year'; autumn) and the "last hurrah" before Allelieweziel crosses us over to the Dark Half.

Erntfescht is the celebration of the Ase. On this day we shall honor Ziu, Zisa, Wudan, Freid, Dunner, Siwwa, Idunn, der Vorsetzer, Waahra, Saaga, and other deities who are part of, or associated with, that tribe.

Erntfescht is a time to eat, to engage in fellowship, and to play Kubb.

Erntfescht is when Distelfink's Associate Members become Full Members.

It is possible that the Suevi feast to Zisa that resulted in the throttling of Roman troops under Titus Annius at Zizarim in 1 BCE was a form of this observance. The two feasts bear certain markers in common, but this is only a theory at this time.

ZISASEGE



The Zisasege Feast Day is September 28, but this observance is often combined with Erntfescht for group ritual.

Zisa is a fascinating goddess. Virtually unknown within most Heathen circles until Urglaawer began to observe the feast day, more and more probable links to existing lore have turned up over the last dozen years.

This is one of those cases in which the Church unintentionally preserved lore about one of our goddesses after having relegated Her to an aspect of Mary. Mary Undoer-of-Knots encapsulates

many of the aspects associated with Zisa. She is the remover (or placer) of obstacles for just causes.

Her name appears to share the same root as that of Ziu, which makes a connection between the Sky Father and Zisa. Some words that relate to Ziu in German instead referred to Zisa in the Suevi dialect. The word for Tuesday, "Zistag," was replaced by the Diocese of Augsburg with "Aftermontag" ('after Monday') in order to try to erase the goddess' importance. The modern city of Augsburg was Zisa's city, "Zizarim," or "Cisarim," at the time when the Roman army was defeated in an attempt to seize the city. They happened to choose September 28 (current calendar) of the year 1 BCE, and discovered that the city had three times (more or less) the anticipated population because many Suevi from the heath had come to the city for celebrations. (Note: Those celebrations might have been harvest

festivals that share roots with our Erntfescht. It makes sense that the Suevi would hold a feast to their primary deity at the harvest, but more research is needed).

There are references in Deutsch lore that can easily be connected to Her. A charm refers to the South Star being the delight of the North Star's eye. The association between the North Star and Ziu are known, but for many years I was puzzled by how a northern people knew of the South Star. To the rescue came Ben Waggoner of The Troth, who guided me toward references of the star Vega being used by northern navigators as a reference point to the south. Vega was once the North Star and, due to the vagaries of our axis precession, it will be again in about 13,000 years.

Norse lore's Lokasenna makes a reference to an unnamed wife of Tyr, whom Loki says bore him a child.

There is evidence of some conflation between Zisa and Isis due to Roman recorders' placing Zisa into a context they understood.

Centuries after conversion, Duke Esnerius (or Esenerius), Duke of Swabia Castle built a chapel to Zisa at Hillomondt (modern-day Kempten). The Swabians are the successors of the Suevi, serving as an indicator of the importance of Zisa even so long after the Church attempted to wipe out the memory of Her.

Pinecones are sacred to Her. She protects the Suevi the way the pinecone protects its seeds.

The color red is associated with her, just as it is with Ziu.

Newer lore: The Deutsch rune Kerze (cognate in meaning to Kenaz) is associated with Zisa. Kerze is proactive elemental metal, harnessed fire, and illumination of hidden information. In dry conditions with wind and fire, the pine cone releases seeds, allowing regeneration.

Post-modern question for consideration: Who tends to Ziu's hand after He loses it? Who is, essentially, the other hand of Ziu?

Although we often combine Zisasege with Erntfescht due to practicality and time constraints, we have separate altars for each observance. Our Zisasege altar is very much red in color with pine cones and knotted strings on the table. As part of

the ritual, participants are invited to take a string home with them and to meditate upon the knots in their lives. Once the meditation is completed, they can sympathetically undo the knot while appealing to Zisa for aid. Remember, the basis needs to be right action coming from a right mind.

Also, some knots are better off left tied, and sometimes loose strings need a knot. If you come to Zisa for aid, be sure you understand the potential consequences of untying your knots. Many times we think our actions are pure, but they are often agenda-driven, and it is important to be honest with ourselves about that fact.

Eat heartily and honor this great goddess of the Suevi and of the Deitsch!
More on this observance will be posted in the [Urglaawe Facebook Group](#).

Full Moon (Baermuun): Friday, September 29, 2023

New Moon (Fuxmuun): Saturday, October 14, 2023

Full Moon (Fuxmuun): Saturday, October 28, 2023



ES ALLELIEWEZIEL



Begins at sunset on October 30 and ends with Ewicher Yeeger Sege at sunset on November 10.

Es Allelieweziel is a major observance on the Urlgaawe calendar. All observances are important, but a few of them have been growing in scope over the last few years, and Allelieweziel is one of them.

The first thing you might want to do is to understand the term. An old [article from 2010](#) actually describes the term. In 2018 or 2019, we learned that a cognate of the term does not seem to be found in German, but one can be found in Dutch in relation to All Souls Day. There likely is a connection between the word "soul" and the "Ziel" (literally, "goal") portion of Allelieweziel, which might have been an attempt at approximating the Deutsch word "Seel" (soul). At this point, though, it doesn't matter.

Respondents and informants about the term and the observance were fairly consistent. This is the "goal of all love" in our modern understanding. This is Allelieweziel.

ANCESTOR/FOREBEAR SHRINE

Many Urglaawer have an ancestor or forebear shrine, a generic term which in Deutsch could be "die Vorgengersweih" or "die Vorfaahrersweih."

Linguistic segue:

The semantic difference between "ancestor" and "forebear" is much more slight in Deutsch than in English. Both "Vorgenger" and "Vorfaahrer" can mean either "ancestor" or "forebear." Most Deutsch speakers, if asked to say the word for "ancestors" would use "Vorgenger" (in the plural form: "they who went before"). If asked for the word for "forebears," the response would be either "Vorgenger" or "Vorfaahrer" ("they who fared before"). It is important to note that forebears covers a wide range of people who have influenced our lives. They might be unrelated to you by blood, but there is more to life and existence than blood. We do venerate our ancestors (and each other's ancestors), but we have room on our shrines for our personal heroic figures and those who aided our ancestors, etc.

Note: I tend to use the term Vorgengersweih for the shrine to those who have gone before.

The Vorgengersweih can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. Because Urglaawe's understanding is that there is a general continuity from birth through life, through death, and through rebirth, it is not considered improper to honor the living alongside the dead, so living forebears (and even Noochkummer/Noochgenger - descendants) may be included on the shrine.

REFERENCES

There are numerous blog posts on Urglaawe.net and articles in "Hollerbeer Hof," among other places. One place folks should always keep in mind for resources

on observances is the Files section in the main Urglaawe Facebook group. The two anchor rituals of the Allelieweziel observance are called:

- Allelieweziel, but the main components here are the Butzemannsege, or the burning of the Butzemann, and Holle's departure.
- Ewicher Yeeger Sege, the feast day of Holler, also known as the Ewicher Yeeger/Eternal Hunter (Death). We also recognize the "little deaths" that often go unremarked in our society: divorces, miscarriages, broken relationships, etc.

Thus, the two main deities associated with Allelieweziel are Holle and Her consort, Holler. In 2020, we also included honoring Holler's brother, der Schlumm, who is a blind deity who can only walk in dream states and altered states,

Deities are not tied to calendars or calendar dates. Our observances are nailed to linear time concepts that might bear little true resemblance to the spirals or helixes of time and matter throughout the cosmos. Yet, while our calendars and our brains might not be able to wrap themselves fully around cosmic time and matter concepts, many of us see the "short cycles" of the seasons and of the life cycle. It is often said that we are "star stuff," born from the same matter that burns inside the stars themselves. Stars are born. Stars die. From the remnants of the stars' death comes the setting for the birth of more stars.

MEDITATIONS

The very fibers of our being are connected to the larger spirals and helixes of the cosmos, but that is the sort of thing we consider during this Allelieweziel season.

- Why honor Death?
- What does Death mean in the great cosmic scheme?

One of the pitfalls of the meditations of Allelieweziel and of Voryuul is that we can feel very small and insignificant. Eventually we will have guided meditations so that folks don't get lost in the abyss of self-doubt and questioning of self-worth within the enormity of cosmic discussions that are increasingly likely to arise during Allelieweziel.

THE GREAT COSMIC OBSERVANCE

Holle's departure signals the onset of the Wild Hunt, also known as the Furious Host and the Parade of Spirits (native Deutsch term: die Geischderschtrutz).

All of our other observances, including Yuul, are focused on Mannheem (here, where we live) and on human activity and points of reference. Even Wonnenacht, with Holle's return, is mostly about the return of life to Mannheem, though it does hint at all of the realms joyously celebrating the passing parade).

No, there is something unique about Allelieweziel and the departure. This is about that moment when the star explodes, or when we die, or about huge transitions putting out energy. Holle's journey is cosmic, not just limited to Mannheem.

Perhaps this is about the spiral outward from Mannheem when we die? Or with each rebirth and stage in our evolution? What happens in those other realms as the Hunt approaches? Where are we as a race in our evolution? Are we any closer to being where the deities were when this cosmic day started? Is part of Allelieweziel about the point at which all of existence becomes a singularity?

SIMPLE STUFF

Besides pondering the wonders of all of creation, we should also note that, historically, Allelieweziel was the time when male ancestors and forebears were honored (much like the Idise are at Entschtanning) for their work and sacrifices that helped to build the community. This goes alongside the beginnings of die Schlachtzeit, or the culling/butchering time. The actual culling and maturation of meat (beef takes 10-30 days) traditionally falls almost entirely in the time between Allelieweziel and Yuul. Often it is the bulls and elderly cows that were culled to serve as food for humans and domestic pets, and their culling also conserves food resources for the heifers and younger or healthier cows through the winter.

RESOLUTIONS

Most Heathens know how significant oaths are. Whether they are called oaths, promises, pledges, or resolutions, they typically last for a finite period, at the end of which they should be completed. So goes it for most New Year's

Resolutions. Many Resolutions are completed earlier in the year, but for many personal changes or improvements to be successful, many individuals (and Brauchers) will lay out smaller chunks of the overarching goal. These chunks are typically timed so that the entire resolution is completed by Allelieweziel and then the old habit is symbolically killed in the fires of Allelieweziel or of Hollersege/Ewicher Yeeger.

Some of the people I interviewed felt that any time prior to Erschdi Nacht/First Night of Yuul is acceptable because that finishes one resolution cycle right when it is time to consider any need for a resolution in the next cycle.

Animal Husbandry: Wildlife: der Fux (Fox)

Storm Smith - Columbus, OH

The most prevalent, and therefore most likely to encounter, wild fox in North America is the Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)-which is a species, rather than solely an indicator of color.



Image by Storm Smith -
WalkingWildRescue.org

“Red foxes are small to medium-sized canids weighing 8 to 12 lbs on average. They have a rusty red coat often with a fluffy white-tipped tail and black legs. Red Foxes mate for life. Their lifespan in the wild is about 4 years on average.” While notoriously timid, the red fox does have a history

of adapting to urbanization as they, “are a synanthropic species, meaning they live near humans and directly benefit from this behavior. They thrive in human-altered

environments like gardens, parks, cemeteries, neighborhoods, and farms”(Red Fox FAQ).

There is a notoriously large population of urban foxes in London, England. So glimpses of this small canid do happen. If they're in your area you will most likely hear one of their 12 distinctive cries. (Red Fox Sounds & Calls) Foxes are opportunistic omnivores, and their hunt for food is how they most often end up crossing paths with humans. Foxes prey on small animals—such as mice, rats, squirrels, birds, water fowl, and insects; as well as scavenging (such as our garbage and roadkill); and will also eat fallen fruit and vegetation at times (Red Fox FAQ).

Like so many other animals (and many other elements of our ecosystem), the best course of action is simply to limit our - and our domestic animals' - interactions with foxes as much as possible. Keep domestic animals contained, restrained, and/or trained away from wildlife and clean up after them - and ourselves. Feeding wildlife (outside of birds and bees) is actually detrimental for animals in the long run.

“Since red foxes are monogamous, if one of a mated pair is killed the other mate suffers, and often shows signs of depression such as wailing and not eating.”

Red foxes are one of many species that self regulate their population based on access to food. So though well intentioned, giving foxes food can actually cause an unsupported baby boom that the natural ecosystem cannot support - meaning some of those kits will starve or become dependent on humans for food. Neither of which is a healthy and sustainable strategy. When wildlife becomes dependent on humans, most interactions end badly for them - for example: car strikes, starvation, or being hunted and killed by others.

According to the Canid Project, “Feeding wild animals teaches that people are food sources, which then causes them to lose their natural fear of humans.

Without this fear, wildlife may approach people, coming too close for comfort, hoping for that handout. This behavior can either irritate or frighten people, leading to complaints, relocation, or euthanasia of the animal deemed problematic. Feeding, especially by hand, amplifies the odds of someone getting bitten. When that occurs, it is almost always the animal that suffers the grim consequences” (The Canid Project, Red Foxes - blog).

These consequences should not be taken lightly. Since red foxes are monogamous, if one of a mated pair is killed the other mate suffers, and often shows signs of depression such as wailing and not eating. So it’s always best to enjoy wildlife respectfully in order to promote a harmonious relationship - called “Zusaagpflicht” in Deutsch - for everyone!

Image by Storm Smith -
WalkingWildRescue.org

To help, “The Canid Project does offer free consultations [and recommendations] on humane fox deterrents and proofing” (Red Fox 2021.PDF), if you wish to discourage your local foxes from inhabiting your area. However, Red Foxes are a valuable part of the ecosystem, and “help control populations of rodents and rabbits in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Rodents are known to spread disease and can become crop-threatening pests in agricultural areas. Red Foxes also disperse seeds by eating fruit and are part of our natural clean up crew, like vultures, as they scavenge roadkill.” So if you’d like to encourage wildlife in your yard try including brush piles, water features, and native plants; and avoid pesticides, traps, and rodent poison” (Red Fox 2021.PDF).



A more rare, but possible, type of fox you might come across is of the domesticated variety. According to the captive bred fox and wolf-dog rescue, WalkingWildRescue.org, “Currently, in the United States, captive bred foxes are

being raised two ways, either born on a fur farm to be pelted or bred for the ‘pet’ industry.” Unfortunately there are still more than 10 states with fox fur farms, with more than 56 fox fur farms in the US—ultimately resulting in more than “1500 average number of foxes pelted in the US each year.”

The best way to combat this unneeded and cruel industry is simply to avoid real fur products. Unlike wild foxes, captive bred foxes, “are multiple generations removed from their wild cousins and do not have the instincts to survive. Not only are they not able to survive in the wild, releasing one would be like letting an invasive species into the wild. Captive red type foxes can occur in over 70 different color morphs that don’t occur naturally.

These color variations, if in the wild, would not allow them to blend into their environment leaving them visible to humans and predators.

“Some people purchase foxes from breeders, excited to have a cool fox pet, but many of those people don’t understand what it is like to own a fox. People in these situations often end up neglecting their fox or feel that they have no choice but to abandon it in the wild where it has a slim chance of survival due to being captive bred and having imprinted on people” (Foxes) “Signs”: (healthy patterns).

Foxes are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. However since they are opportunistic hunters, it isn’t unheard of for them to look for day dwelling prey at times - especially between March and July during peak hunting, and baby feeding, season. Keeping with this preference for liminality, the red fox is also known as an ‘edge species’, which means they naturally occur at the borders between two habitat types, which is called an ‘ecotone.’ These ecotones, such as woodlands transitioning into grasslands, offer them different resources that they need to survive, which is why red foxes do not select just woodlands as their habitat. Water sources and corridors, like creeks, are also important in habitat selection. Den sites are usually found within at least 1 to 2 miles of a water source.”

[...] “Through our own expansion, city developments, and agricultural practices we have created an ‘induced ecotone’ that mimics in many ways the natural ecotones where red foxes are found naturally in the wild. Human-modified areas often provide a mosaic of habitats: grass and fields where they can hunt,

ditches, parks with trees and fragmented woodlands that provide cover and safety, corridors, and even denning opportunities in our green spaces and sometimes under our shed and houses (Note: it is thought that Red Foxes may prefer a more natural setting away from high human traffic for dens, unless the lack of resources or green space is high, then they will be more likely to den under/in human infrastructure). And of course [...] living among humans, or in close proximity to humans, means even more food resources via our trash and the rodents drawn to it” (Seeing more red foxes in your neighborhood or town? here’s why...).

A red fox’s home territory can range up to 3 sq miles in rural areas, but are



much smaller in urban environments where food is abundant. Within this territory they will have several caches, where they bury their food in order to keep it hidden to return to and eat later. While typically a solitary hunter, mated pairs do live together during mating season to raise their kits in dens (Red Fox FAQ). A den is typically, “a hole dug into the ground, with a hollowed-out chamber at the end of the entrance tunnel where the fox sleeps and in which [kits] are raised. The

chambers are typically between one and three meters (3-10 ft) below ground, with tunnels generally leading to more than one entrance (a main entrance and emergency exit). [...] They may also mark the entrance with scat. A [den] may be used for several consecutive years” (Red Fox Moults).

Image by Storm Smith - WalkingWildRescue.org

Denning season tends to be between February and late July in most areas. Sometimes a female from the previous year's litter will stick around to help with the new year's litter. The kits will start to venture out of their den at approximately 4 to 5 weeks old. However fox mothers will often move their kits between 2 or 3 dens, especially if she decides one is no longer safe. Then between August and September the young foxes disperse to find territories of their own (Red Fox FAQ).

A fox's coat changes with the weather throughout the year, however there do seem to be two main seasons for shedding - at least as reported in French foxes: "A spring moult where the old winter coat was lost and an autumn moult during which underfur grew in. The foxes started shedding in early April and the coat lost its lustre; by the end of the month new growth had started at the base of the legs. New hair growth progressed up the legs and, by the end of June, the summer coat completely covered the legs, abdomen and flanks; growth on the back and tail was complete by late August or early September (this was the summer coat) and then there's something of a hiatus for a month or so. [...] During October and November, Maurel and his colleagues recorded growth of some of the fine (underfur) hairs that hadn't grown during the summer--this thickened up the coat in time for winter. [...] The coats of [kits] do not undergo this change during their first year but continue to grow consistently as their bodies increase in size. Their first moult, during their second year, has little adverse effect on the youngsters. As they age, however, the moults tend to induce lethargy and apathy, causing them to sleep more."

"Hormonal studies on fur farm foxes have demonstrated that the moult is controlled by endocrine glands and stimulated by light such that altering the photoperiod (i.e. making the day appear longer or shorter) or thyroid/hormone levels can cause the moult to speed up or slow down accordingly. Some reports suggest that a warm autumn can delay moulting by a week-or-two, while an early frost accelerates it"(Red Fox Moult) "Omens": (negative indicators).

If you see a fox that appears to be "chasing or stalking a cat, dog, or human it is most likely because the cat or dog is too close to the fox's den. This is normal behavior called 'escorting'. Foxes are great parents and are just making sure you stay away" (Red Fox FAQ).

Red foxes' natural reaction to humans is to flee, and they normally hunt prey species—not dogs or cats. So if you (or your predator pets) are approached by a fox, or it doesn't run from you when approaching it, something is wrong. The possibilities include rabies - although that is very rare - or that it is a domesticated fox that was dumped in the wild. In either case, the first step is to contact your local rabies vector-species wildlife rehabilitator (Red Fox FAQ). In the rare, but possible, case that it is a domestic fox a rehabilitator will be able to tell it's not wild; so then please contact Walking Wild Rescue (Fox Surrender/Re Home).

The Canid Project suggests, “just observe the fox's behavior. If you notice any unusual physical issues like partial paralysis or the inability to use their limbs well, circling or staggering as if drunk, seizures, discharge from the nose and mouth, acting aggressively or too tame, do not approach the fox, and contact your local animal control agency or fox rescue” (Red Fox FAQ).

If your domestic prey animals, such as chickens, continue to be predated - despite extra care on your part - or your garbage is being raided, there may be a disruption in the local ecosystem. For example, construction could have displaced them. Or if they're struggling to find food, then foxes are more likely to venture further into our areas than usual. This may also indicate that someone has been feeding them and has disrupted their natural cohabitation with humans. Please do what you can to educate your neighbors.

Folklore:

According to the Pennsylvania Deutsch folklore collected by Robert L. Schreiwer, “In the Fall, it is more the fox that is looked to for an idea of when the first hard frost will strike. The thickness of the fox's fur is used to predict whether that frost will hit in October, November, or December, and then the depth of the den and the distance from water are factors that observers use to predict the date of the frost.”

(Wonnezeit)

“Der Fux” is the eighth animal in the Urglaawe zodiac. Fux “teaches us to apply our intelligence to the world around us” and is considered “family oriented, brave, passionate, distrusting, secretive, cunning, [and] jealous.” Fux is also associated with the element of salt. (Es Muunraad)

Citations:

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- Schreiwer, Robert L. (2018, March 17). Es Muunraad [Sacred Space Conference].

Also Recommended:

- <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/what-do-about-foxes>
- https://www.nwrawildlife.org/page/Coexist_with_Wildlife
- <https://www.ohiowildlifecenter.org/found-an-animal/>

Musings About Deitsch Identity

Jeremy Baker - Columbus, OH

I am forty years old, and my Deitsch grandparents grew up in the 1930s. They grew up speaking Deitsch at home and their teachers attempted to “fix” that once they got to school. Because our family moved to Pittsburgh in 1963, my grandparents were our last connection to both the Deitsch language and culture. To the best of my perception, Gram and Pap were very much of the mindset, “We are American, we speak English,” (at least in front of the kids.)

Because of where we lived, I had no idea that they had Deitsch accents; that’s just how I thought Gram and Pap talked. If I am entirely honest, I didn’t even know there was a Pennsylvania Dutch language until I entered graduate school. It simply was not talked about.

It was subtle things that pointed me towards my heritage. Gram made “Fast Knots,” in February, and they visited family in Reading at least once a year. Their house was prominently decorated with both German and Deitsch knick-knacks. However, they were, first and foremost, modern Americans. I will never forget the first time I made pickled beets. I used my great grandmother’s recipe and even canned the mason jars in a hot bath. The next time I saw my grandmother, I eagerly told her about my newly learned skills. After I was done, she said in a loving, but pitying tone, “Oh, Jeremy. They sell those in the store.”

For better or worse, that was the ethos of their generation. They grew up snapping chicken’s necks and slaughtering pigs. Their childhoods took place during the Great Depression. They earned the right to their TV dinners and color television shows. The “New and Improved” way was to just buy it at the store. It was part of what it meant to be a modern American.

Many of us had grandparents who were conditioned to not talk about their heritage, and a good number of them did not work on farms. I had a college-age student once say to me, “Yea, my mom says we are Pennsylvania Dutch, but I don’t know what that means.” Sadly, for young people of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, this is an entirely standard response. The vast majority of us have been off the farm

for at least two generations. People who are 23 today could have had grandparents who were active in the disco scene in the 1970s.

Culture, especially a culture as heavy in folklore as ours, is very easy to think about as existing in the past (this is especially evident when considering how the public perceives Native Americans). We are just as Deitsch as our grandparents, and they were just as Deitsch as our ancestors from 1845. Cultural preservation is a great thing, but the ways we are passing culture on to our children today are also beautiful. As a people, we need to move past the 1800s, and figure out what it means to be Deitsch today. I promise, this task is certainly big enough to keep us busy.

The Unifying Spirit of Harvest Home (Erntefest)

Gretchen E. Swank - Boalsburg, PA



Willkumm Schpotyaahrswedder! (Welcome Fall Weather), and Welcome to September. I write this sitting outdoors next to Harner Farm, grabbing a quick lunch between healing jobs, while I enjoy the crisp chill riding the breeze; I feel quite blessed. After dropping my son off at school, I spent some quiet time alone at my studio in reflection

and meditation upon my studies within the Braucherei and Hexerei Guild of Practitioners of Urglaawe before I transitioned into my healing work lined up for the day: a rewarding Spirit Mediumship session for a distance client, followed by some self-care with my massage therapist, who got me feeling open and clear to do my

daily work with my holistic client at her peaceful, rural residence. The opportunity to do daily energy work and herbalism for her is an honor as a healer, a catalyst to take me deeper on my path as I watch complex medical conditions within her evolve and improve over time.

Her husband is, like me, a person of Pennsylvania Dutch descent, so I often connect with him over traditional culinary recipes, or exchange healing herbs with him. Beyond their home, I have found connecting with a variety of clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, with unique perspectives, struggles, and personal challenges, is nothing less than a gift, as is the plentiful herb garden that crafts my practice, and the love and support that surround me each day, are gifts from spirit who guide my work.

It does not escape me that these feelings overpower me at this time of abundance; when the seasons shift, and there is a great pull inward toward home and gatherings of celebration with family and community; a reminder to always take



time for gratitude and find the grace that weaves itself throughout each day. That is the spirit of the season; that is the legacy our ancestors laid for us to carry forward with the holiday of Harvest Home, an old tradition with its roots in paganism that extended forward through the centuries in Britain, Europe, and eventually North America, where the tradition continues today in the culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch, as well as some New England towns.

The term “Harvest Home” originated in the British Isles. English, Celtic, and Saxon rituals surrounding the harvest included large dinners, dances, celebrations at the end of

the grain harvest, and the cailleac, or last grain sheaf, which represented the spirit of the field, became the “Kern (corn) Baby”, dressed as a maiden and paraded through the streets. The Kern Baby was also drenched in water as a rain charm and saved until the following spring planting season. As time moved forward, Harvest Home evolved. According to the Old Farmer’s Almanac, “it was also a time to hold elections, pay workers, and collect rents. These festivals usually took place around the autumnal equinox. It was a time for family members and workers to return to their towns for festivities.”

The custom was brought to Pennsylvania in the early 18th century by the settlers who became known as the Pennsylvania Dutch, whose Deitsch translation of the tradition was Erntfescht or Erntdankfescht. Part of this tradition for the settlers involved ensuring that all families within the community had enough food to make it through the winter. Farmers stepped up to fill in the gaps where other farmers were lacking, so that everyone was taken care of, and the relationships within the community were symbiotic. These relationships among neighbors translated well into their relationship with their land, which represented well in a good crop and harvest.

The Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch terms were eventually replaced by the English term “Harvest Home,” and the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Pennsylvania, as well as many Mennonite meeting houses, held special Harvest Home services and celebrations. Harvest Home celebrations typically took place according to the church congregation’s customs; however, celebrations were usually held anytime between early July to mid-October, though most typically happened in August.

Harvest Home became absorbed by the Thanksgiving holiday outside of the Deitscherei. Though Thanksgiving was celebrated widely in New England since the 1600’s, there was much resistance to the holiday in Pennsylvania. In 1817, the governor of Pennsylvania declared the third Thursday of November be set aside as a day of thanksgiving, but most Pennsylvania Dutch refused to observe the “Yankee holiday.” By 1863, when Abraham Lincoln officially declared the fourth Thursday of November a national holiday of Thanksgiving, there are records of Lancaster County families celebrating Thanksgiving several years before, so it did eventually take hold, but there always has been, and there always will be, a distinction

between Erntfesch and Thanksgiving, with separate celebrations; Erntfesch around the time of the Autumnal Equinox, while the harvest was in abundance and the energetic yielding of the year's crops carried joy throughout the community on a tide of gratitude, and Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November, as designated by the national government, when the weather became cold and the majority of the harvest had been safely stocked away for the winter months.

The Pennsylvania Dutch people had little use for centralized authority, and the Thanksgiving holiday was certainly of no use to them considering the Erntfesch celebrations already ripe within their community for over 100 years on North American soil, and beyond since it was carried with them from their motherland. In fact, Thanksgiving had tried, and failed, several times to take hold in America prior to 1863.

According to the York County History Center, after Lancaster became the capital for one day on September 27th, 1777, before shifting west to York, it was there in York it was proclaimed December 18th would be the first national Thanksgiving day to commemorate American victory at the Battle of Saratoga on October 17th. Since then, the holiday reinvented itself several times in an attempt to reunite the country torn by war.

“Always take time for gratitude and find the grace that weaves itself throughout each day. That is the spirit of the season; that is the legacy our ancestors laid for us to carry forward with the holiday of Harvest Home.”

The Pennsylvania Dutch made up nearly half of Pennsylvania's population during the time of the Revolutionary War, and the Fancy Dutch generally supported the Patriot cause, with every regiment from Pennsylvania containing German speaking and Pennsylvania Dutch speaking fighters. Suffice to say, though our ancestors were not particularly fond of “centralized authority,” they had every

interest in preserving the freedoms they immigrated to Pennsylvania to obtain, as assimilation to British culture was of no interest to them, and is reflected beautifully in the motto on the first edition of the Pennsylvania Dutch flag that translates from Pennsylvania Dutch, as follows: “Dear Lord in heaven, let us Pennsylvania Dutch be who we are.” The flag with motto was approved by a committee of members of the Groosdaadi Grundsau Lodge and dedicated at the Allentown Court House on October 6th, 1989, precisely 306 years after the ship, the Concord, landed at Philadelphia in 1683 carrying the first Palatinate immigrants who founded Germantown.

Of course, not all Palatinate immigrants were of the Christian faith, some were pagan, and even those Fancy Deitsch of devout Christian belief carried a mixture of pagan and Christian traditions with them to the new world. For example, both the Easter and the Christmas holidays contain pre-Christian and Christian traditions. In fact, the Easter Bunny, Easter Eggs, and the Christmas Tree were all introduced to North America via the Pennsylvania Dutch who brought these traditions with them from the Palatinate. The first artwork in North America depicting the Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs is from Berks County, Pennsylvania in the 1700's, and is currently on display at the Berks History Center, while the first Christmas Tree was recorded in Lancaster County displayed by a Pennsylvania Dutch family in 1821.

Historians have proven the deep pagan roots of some of these holiday garnishments, which the Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch people are responsible for their introduction into America. While Christmas and Easter are holidays which straddle the line of Christianity and Paganism,



Harvest Home and Thanksgiving are holidays which are purely pagan, neither are associated with Christianity. Puritans who came to settle the Massachusetts Bay Colony shunned Christmas and Easter for their pagan elements and chose to spend their Thanksgiving celebrations in prayer rather than feast. They also shunned the Native American rituals and spiritual observances for the same reasons.

When I do my daily work for my in-home client, I see a modern corn husk doll propped up next to the window overlooking the farm fields outstretched to the foot of the mountain behind her residence. This corn husk doll was typical of the type created by the Native Americans on this continent prior to the Pennsylvania Dutch settlement with the Kern Baby. Spirit runs deep, and unifies across cultures, and continents. We, the Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch, are a proud, unified, people, who want to be who we are, indeed. And there is no denying, we are a culture that is rich from the history, region, and spiritual influences that shaped us, compelled us here to this new land, and continues to evolve us forward.

I submit to you, Erntfescht is, and always will be rooted in our agricultural history as a people, that binding thread of community, good will, and spiritual devotion for our livelihood as a people, I envision the spirit of Erntfescht will grow stronger as those within the Pennsylvania Dutch Community more fully embrace the nuances, depth, and full circumference of its own slogan, “Liewer gott im Himmel drin, loss uns Deutsche was mir sin” (Dear Lord in heaven, let us Pennsylvania Dutch be who we are). We are a thriving, evolving culture, and for that I am so grateful, as I live with such pride of my ancestry, and the representation I provide from my heart, forward. Halliches Erntfescht!

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Resources

Books

The First Book of Urglaawe Myths

Available on [Amazon](#)

A Dictionary of Urglaawe Terminology

Available on [Amazon](#) and [Lulu](#)

Websites

[Urglaawe International](#)

Social Media

[Urglaawe Facebook Community](#)

[Heathens Against Hate](#)

[Alliance for Inclusive Heathenry](#)

[Heathens in Recovery](#)

Blogs and Podcasts

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[Urglaawe](#)

[Holle's Haven Podcast](#) (also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts)

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