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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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## PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN CRAFTS

The contribution of Pennsylvania-German folk art to America's artistic tradition is presented in the exhibition, New Horizons in American Art, which opens at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, on September 16. The Pennsylvania Germans are famous for their cookery and their barns, but the excellence of their useful and applied arts has not been generally known. Yet for two centuries they perpetuated a genuine style in handicrafts, which enriches American life with a rich and decorous fantasy not always evident in other strains of the national heritage. The Index of American Design of the Federal Art Project has been recording this authentic American folk art; watercolors and drawings from its survey will be included in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

The Germans who immigrated to Pennsylvania early in the 18th century continued to live as they had in their mother-country. The great stone barns dotting the Pennsylvania countryside today are the visible signs of this mode of life. The Pennsylvania Germans brought the general design of these barns from Europe, adapting the design so perfectly to the American scene that some authorities call the Pennsylvania barns the most beautiful architecture in America. This same transformation from a foreign to a native tradition has taken place in all the Pennsylvania-German folk arts: ceramics, cabinet-making, cast-iron stove-plates, wood sculptures, and the "fraktur" drawings--hand-colored and highly decorated certificates of births, baptisms, weddings and deaths. The name "fraktur"--meaning literally "broken"--comes from the old German gothic type, which has a somewhat broken line; and the Pennsylvania-German fraktur drawings themselves actually perpetuate the medieval craft of manuscript illumination.

The distinctive and unmistakable quality of Pennsylvania-German culture expresses the character of the life led by these early American settlers in whom piety and prudence mingle. Basic in their existence was an intense concentration on religion, coupled with a solid bourgeois concern for the morrow, which led to a thrifty husbandry. The Pennsylvania barns are the form necessitated by the Pennsylvania-German farmer's thriftiness, incorporating as they do in one huge

structure storehouses for fodder and grain, large dairy quarters, threshing and winnowing floors, and shelter for cattle and farm equipment. In his folk art the Pennsylvania German gave expression to another side of his nature: his pietistic faith voiced itself in the fractur drawings, with their constant emphasis on religion; and his human yearnings for beauty and joy and sheer fun, disciplined by the social standards of his community, burst out in paintings on glass, polychromed wood sculptures, chalkware figurines, children's toys carved from wood; the religious and esthetic urges were combined in utilitarian objects such as the cast-iron stove-plates, embossed with biblical scenes.

Fraktur drawings were found in all the counties of Pennsylvania settled by the Germans. This authentic tradition in American folk art, directly related to manuscript illumination, was brought to this country by German religious groups, especially that one under the leadership of Conrad Beissel which founded a religious community at Ephrata, in Lancaster County, in 1728. Fraktur painting continued in America long after the craft had died out in Europe.

Drawn with a goose quill and the colors often laid in with a cat's hair brush, the drawings deal with both religious and secular subjects, although the birth, wedding, baptismal and death certificates are best known. They are gay in color---with red, yellow, green and blue boldly handled. So widely practiced was the art that fractur was a standard course of instruction in Pennsylvania-German schools up to the middle of the 19th century. The human desire for beauty is shown by the fact that these drawings concerned themselves not only with such documentary purposes as birth and baptismal certificates but also were rewards of merit, bookmarks, portraits, landscapes and pictures of birds and animals.

Stove-plates do not sound like a conventional form of art. But the Pennsylvania-German stove-plates actually are applied art of a high order. These plates were fastened together to make a so-called "jamb stove" built into the back of a fireplace; hot embers were shoveled into the stove, thus warming the room backing the fireplace. The plates were decorated in relief, often with biblical subjects, such as the slaying of Abel, the temptation of Joseph and the marriage at Cana, though many plates have decorative treatments of the tulips and birds common in the grammar of ornament of Pennsylvania-German art. "The

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Peaceable Kingdom" was a favorite biblical theme and "The Test" a frequent humorous subject, both dating from the middle of the 18th century.

Made from designs carved in wood by craftsmen believed to have been trained in Germany, these stove-plates are related to the peasant arts of Germany, as is true generally of Pennsylvania-German work. Most of them were cast between 1735 and 1790, but the best period was between 1740 and 1760; and some of the best examples were cast at Durham Furnace in Bucks County, Warwick Furnace in Chester County, and at Marlboro Furnace in the Shenandoah Valley.

Little known are the Pennsylvania-German plaster or chalkware figurines, frequently made in imitation of Staffordshire figures. Cruder technically than their models, they are often better in color and design and are among the most interesting examples of American polychromed small sculpture. Most of the pieces surviving were made after 1850, although the art was known early in the 18th century.

Whittling is the most democratic of the folk arts; and carving toys for children one of its most common expressions. Of this nature were the "Schimmel toys," carved from wood. These toys are, according to legend, the work of one Schimmel who is said to have wandered about Pennsylvania, busy with his jackknife. His work must have been imitated by others, as a vast number of the toys survive.

Sculptures carved from wood and polychromed, weather-vanes and paintings on glass are other forms the artistic urge took in the work of Pennsylvania-German folk artists. This folk art was a pervasive one, permeating the life of the people, adding color and richness to their daily occupations and diversions, as well as serving the present as a source for that organic American tradition in art which has been the object of artists' and critics' search ever since America was re-discovered by its intellectuals in the decade after the war. That rediscovery is now widening out to reach a vast audience, the American people, as is evident in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

The endearing qualities of Pennsylvania-German art spring from the contrast between the inherited European tradition--almost gothic in some instances, as in the fractur drawings--and the individuality with which the useful objects have been designed and executed. Here is the same intuitive functionalism evident in Shaker design, a demonstration that the best art comes from a social situation where the artist's work is an honored and essential part of the community's life.

Index of American Design, (continued)MICHIGAN

Beverly Chichoster  
Eugene Croc  
Vincent McPharlin

NEW JERSEY

Francis Law Durand  
Thomas Halloway

NEW MEXICO

E. Boyd

NEW YORK

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Jessie Benge  
R. Campbell  
Margaret Concha  
Nicholas Gorid  
Melita Hoffman  
Dorothy Lacey  
Yolande de Lasser  
George Horlick

NEW YORK (cont.)

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Nina Lowry  
Marie Mitchell  
William P. Shearwood  
J. Staloff  
J. Tarantino  
Noel Vicentini  
Simon Weiss  
R. W. Woicosko

PENNSYLVANIA

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William Antrim  
Louis Dibert  
Albert Levono

RHODE ISLAND

McCarthy  
Donovan  
Albert Gold

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Children's Work: Paintings

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Children's Work: Sculpture

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Hyman Dorfman, 14, NEW YORK  
Antony de Paolo, 11, NEW YORK

Spero Koultukis, 11, NEW YORK  
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The Museum of Modern Art will publish New Horizons in American Art simultaneously with the opening of the exhibition on September 16. The book will include a catalog of the exhibition and a 33 page introduction by Holger Cahill, Director of the Federal Art Project and Editor of Art in America and the author of other books on art. It will be clothbound, with 176 pages and 102 plates, and will sell for \$2.50.