

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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German influence evident in elements of Carroll culture
by Joe Getty

The European source region of Carroll County's Germanic traditions is fertile ground to study the roots of our local heritage. Many elements of local culture, such as architecture, decorative arts, crafts traditions, and daily customs, have precedents in the European towns and villages from which our early settlers migrated.

Themes of local culture in Europe are interpreted in outdoor museums known as "Freilichtmuseums." There are a number of "Open-air" museums in Germany that present the everyday life of earlier periods of history.

In the "open-air" museum facility, vernacular buildings are moved and reconstructed in a plan compatible with their original environment. Original features of the traditional rural buildings are kept intact and appropriate furnishings and agricultural equipment are installed to interpret the life styles and economic history of earlier generations.

In 1984, I had the opportunity to study the interpretation programs at several "open-air" museums in southwestern Germany and Switzerland. During the course of this tour, I saw a number of direct relationships between our local heritage and its Germanic origins.

For example, two recent articles in the "Carroll's Yesteryears" series have presented the union church design in Westminster and Silver Run. At the "open-air" museum Hessenpark, located north of Frankfurt, there is a country church built with a similar plan to what was used in Carroll County.

The Hessenpark structure has a rectangular plan with the entrance and the altar located at the long sides of the building. There was a three-sided gallery facing the altar. While its timber-framed construction differs from churches in this region, the overall design is similar to churches found throughout northern Carroll.

The Black Forest Open Air Museum at Gutach, Germany, and the Swiss Open Air Museum at Ballenberg, Switzerland, provide excellent examples of regional architectural and decorative arts. The agricultural outbuildings provide a special view of domestic and farming traditions brought to this region.

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At the Hohenlofer Open Air Museum at Wackershofen, Germany, there is an excellent example of a four square garden similar to those planted in the Pennsylvania German settled regions of Maryland. This design has a central circular bed with a rose bush in the center.

A domestic building at the Sobernheim Open Air Museum was most closely related to Pennsylvania German buildings that I have seen in Carroll. It was a stone house with a two-room plan built in 1800. The kitchen had features similar to local buildings, such as a large open hearth and piling type insulation in the ceiling.

The Roscheider House at the Konz Open Air Museum had an interesting feature in the stone sill of the kitchen window. It was an oversized stone that was carved out for a sink allowing an interior water disposal directly to the outside. Several years later, we uncovered a similar stone drain in floor of the kitchen as part of our restoration of the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House in Westminster.

Cultural relationships such as these will be the focus of a "Cultural Heritage Tour of Germany and Switzerland" planned for September 1992. The tour leaders, Pastors Frederick Weiser and Larry Neff, will share their expertise about the history of the Pennsylvania German culture in America by touring the regions where these customs and traditions originated.

The public is invited to attend a preview presentation of this tour by Weiser on Thursday. This program will be in the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 East Main Street, Westminster at 7:30 p.m.

If you are unable to attend the preview, but would like to receive the proposed itinerary and reservation materials for the tour, please contact the Historical Society at 848-6494

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: A Halloween party at Edgar Nusbaum's house on High Street in New Windsor in the late 1920s.