

The Pennsylvania German Folklore



Society of Ontario

PGFSO Newsletter

EDITOR: Dave Burkholder
Number 53 Fall 2023 / Winter 2024

Message from the President

End of year greetings to the membership and friends of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society. As this message is being written the fall is definitely turning to winter after what seemed an extended summer. The frosts and now snow have come. This year's growing season has been a mix of abundant rain followed by a very dry August and September. After a slow start the gardens produced abundantly. Crop production was better than usual with some farmers getting in three good cuts of hay. The silos are full of corn and the sheds full of hay and straw. Our English walnut harvest was outstanding this year with about ten bushel picked up from the three trees planted many years ago by Grandfather Sim Reesor. Does this mean a hard winter? The hedgerow apple trees were also heavy with fruit, and hardly a worm was found! The freezer now holds enough applesauce to last 'til next year (we hope so!)



The PGFSO had a fine day in September to participate, for the first time, in the Applefest Day at the Markham Museum. We sold sauerkraut and apple butter and engaged the public by giving tours of our Conestoga wagon. Some also assisted the Markham Historical Society with frying and serving apple fritters.

At the AGM in April a request was received from the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church for financial assistance to refurbish the "dead house", a building used to store caskets through the winter. We have given assistance in the past. A motion was made to contribute \$4000.00 toward the project and this request was honoured.

As the harvest came near to the end, it was time to celebrate.

On Saturday November 25th at 6:30 pm we held our Sausage and Sauerkraut Dinner (see article following)

Wishing all of you a belated Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year.

Paul E. Reesor - President

Upcoming PGFSO Events

PGFSO Annual General Meeting

Saturday April 6th, 2024

10:30 am – 2:00 pm - Lunch will be provided

Rouge Valley Mennonite Church

All Welcome

Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario 68th Annual General Meeting held April 15, 2023 Summary Report

Twenty one of the PGFSO faithful came together at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church. The traditional Presidential reception of coffee, tea, pastries and fruit was appreciated as a great pre-meeting event, especially for the benefit of attendees from a distance.

This was the first AGM held since 2019, the year prior to Covid-19 interrupting our usual gatherings. The following is a brief overview of the meeting.

President Dave Burkholder brought the meeting to order with the tap of the black walnut gavel and reviewed the agenda. Secretary Marie Burkholder led the group through a review of the minutes of our last AGM. After noting two minor revisions the minutes were approved.

Our Treasurer Dave Smith, presented statements for the fiscal year January –December 2022. These were motioned and approved by the meeting. Dave noted that due to the pandemic and absence of AGMs the PGFSO financial statements for the years 2019, 2020 & 2021 had been approved by Board of Directors on behalf of the membership. It was noted that despite a reduction of events, fundraising activities and the receipt of a very generous member bequest we continue to experience a very healthy financial situation. Also noted was that as a charitable organization it is our mandate to give back to our supporting community. In the past we've contributed to specific Society related causes and organizations. This meeting approved ...cont.

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PGFSO Newsletter

Editor: David R. Burkholder
email: daveyrb1952@gmail.com

President PGFSO: Paul E. Reesor
Vice President: Marlene Barkey
Secretary: Lois Reesor

Treasurer: David Smith
Membership: \$20

Articles for the PGFSO Newsletter are welcome

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AGM report continued:

\$4,000.00 towards a recent request from Richmond Hill Presbyterian Cemetery to assist with refurbishing the historic "dead house", a crypt / vault to house caskets until spring burial could take place. Funding in principle was also approved toward the compilation and production of a pictorial and printed history of Homey Farms, the former cheese factory on the original Reesor Homestead north of Locust Hill. It looks as if this will become a winter project. There was also discussion regarding providing some financial support other projects and restorations that may come up in the future.

A web report submitted by our webmaster Vern Sherk was shared with the meeting with the challenge to continue to submit important Society related events, functions, activities and meetings to Vern to post to the website. It is becoming the most consistent method of sharing Society news.

Lorne and Dave provided updates around Society activities and publications. Dave will officially inherit the publishing of our newsletter. The goal is to publish two editions annually, one fall/winter and one spring/summer. Members were encouraged to submit ideas, pictures and articles for future newsletters. Lorne reported that The Markham Museum has approached him wondering if the PGFSO would assist at their end-of-September Apple Fest as a redirection of Society

AGM report continued:

energies since the Black Creek Pioneer Village Fall Festival seems to have run its course. Details regarding displaying our Conestoga wagon as well as providing support for the apple fritter booth will be forth coming over the summer. There was general agreement that this should be pursued.

The date of Saturday, November 25th 2023 was noted as when our next fall sausage and sauerkraut dinner will take place at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church.

Marie Burkholder presented the nomination report and with no additions from the meeting conducted the election of officers for the coming year. The vote was unanimous by the group present. Here is the new approved slate.

PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY OF ONTARIO BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

Officers:

President	Paul E. Reesor
Vice-President	Marlene Barkey
Treasurer	David Smith
Secretary	Lois Reesor
Past President	Dave Burkholder,

Directors:

Esther Lewis	Dean Martin
Louise Pogue	Lorne Smith
Shirley Stalford	

Committees:

Fall Sausage Dinner Committee - Esther Lewis, Lois Reesor
Festivals Committee Chair - Lois Reesor
Webmasters - Vern Sherk & David Smith
Publications & Communications – Dave Burkholder
With no new business being tabled Dave adjourned the business meeting.

A moment of silence in memory of the members who have died in the last years was observed followed by a prayer over our meal.

A delicious soup and salad lunch was enjoyed by all present. This was followed by dessert, coffee, tea and informal visiting and fellowship.

It was good to reconvene this spring as a group after the pandemic interruptions.



Trilliums - Burrows Bros. Bush Lot 13, conc. 9 east tsburkholder

**Reesor Reunion 2023: Restored portrait,
New merchandise and a food truck**

By Barry Reesor -Reesor Family in Canada Pres.

Over six hundred Reesor cousins gathered at the Markham Fairgrounds on Saturday, June 24th for the 2023 Reesor Reunion. Originally planned for June 2020, the organizing committee was unsure when we could safely hold the reunion due to the pandemic.

In December 2022, still with some uncertainty, we thought we might be able to proceed with a simple gathering in 2023 and the wheels started to turn. After the date approached, we were glad that plans fell into place.

Here are some highlights from the reunion:

The restored 1904 portrait of our Reesor progenitor, Peter Reesor was on display, on loan courtesy of the Markham Museum. In addition, there were a number of Reesor artifacts that generated a lot of curiosity. The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario brought their Conestoga wagon for display in the livestock arena. It was a visual reminder of how the family made the long trip from Pennsylvania to Markham in the early 1800s.

The silent auction generated considerable interest, as did the memorabilia table.

New this year were stylish Reesor ball caps and canvas tote bags.



The new & the old

Old Peter Portrait "restored":

Some fun facts:

- Oldest Reesor cousin in attendance – 96 years
- Youngest – 2 weeks (we start them coming young!)
- Furthest Reesor cousin came from China.

It was great to see families gathered for a picnic lunch. A food truck was also on site, a welcome addition to the festivities. Group photos have long been a tradition, but this year's photo was taken by a drone! (see screenshots right.) If you gave your email address during registration, you will receive a copy or check the Reesor Website.

Thank you to the Reesor Family in Canada volunteers for all your efforts in keeping the reunion going despite the scheduling hurdles of the pandemic.



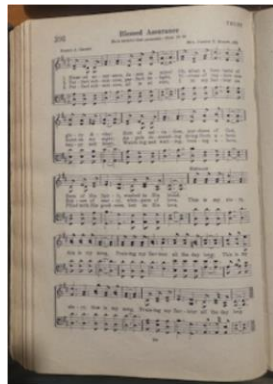
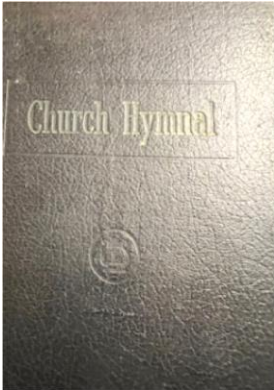
Lois Bain and her registration crew

Altona Mennonite Meeting House Hymn Sing

On Sunday September 10, 2023 at 3:00 pm over 120 community friends, and former neighbours gathered for the annual commemorative service and hymn sing at the Altona Meeting House. It was a time of singing, fellowship, remembrance and renewing longtime friendships.

This annual event is coordinated and planned by a Board of Directors who oversee this designated Historical site and the surrounding cemetery with graves of pioneers who settled in the area in the early 1800s. It's located at the intersection of the Uxbridge/Pickering Townline and Sideline #30 in the Township of Pickering Ontario. A number of Mennonite families, emigrants from Pennsylvania and other areas gathered for worship in their homes until 1825 when the present building was constructed. Worship services were held there on continuing basis until 1974. Commemorative services have been held biennially since 1980.

Board Chair Graham Fretz welcomed the group and invited Lois Burkholder to lead the congregation in several hymns of her choice. Lois then took requests, selecting two verses only of each song in order to accommodate the demand for favorites. The congregation sang from the 1947 Mennonite Church Hymnal with Altona's books supplemented by loaned hymnals from the former Reesor Church repository. (Steeles Avenue, Cedar Grove, Markham). The music in this book is all written in the old style shaped notes.



After ten hymns guest speaker Ruth Smith-Meyer, who grew up in this church, reminisced briefly about her childhood and early life in the then busy town of Altona. She gave thanks to the individual men and women who provided positive role models for her during that period of her life. She challenged those gathered to remember and celebrate the good from their collective pasts and share those stories and memories with the present and future generations.

Graham provided a brief Building & Cemetery report along with a financial report, emphasizing the continuing needs associated with the physical upkeep and repairs to this historic building. Receiptable support donations can be made through [The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario](#).

The singing of the congregation's favorite hymns continued with Dan Yaksich and Lois continuing to lead the enthusiastic singers.

Karen Fretz-Hunt lead the congregation in a Memorial Tribute those who have gone before us and who have contributed to keeping this building and its history alive.

Following a thank you and a closing prayer, everyone was invited to stay for cookies and lemonade on the lawn and cemetery. What a pleasant and enjoyable way to spend a gorgeous fall afternoon.

Thank you to the Trustees and all involved in continuing this significant event.



Altona Meeting House Circa 1852

painting by Elsie Nighswander

PGFSO Apple Fest at Markham Museum

*Apple fest is an annual tradition at the Markham Museum and is one of the tastiest events of the year. It features access to the museum exhibitions, various historic buildings throughout the 25-acre site: miniature train rides, dynamic live entertainment, apple treats, fresh apple cider, food trucks and much more. For the past number of years the Markham Historical Society (MHS) has taken the lead in ensuring that attendees have an opportunity to experiencing one of the tastiest apple treats - **Apple Fritters***

In early spring of 2023 discussion took place around our Society's activities and the absence of the annual fall festival that had historically been held at Black Creek Pioneer Village. The idea of assisting with the Markham Museum's Apple Fest was put forward and after several meetings with the Museum staff we made the decision to direct our energies and expertise into supporting the Markham Historical Society this annual event. And so preparations began.

Arrangement were made to pull the PGFSO Conestoga Wagon from Lorne Smith's storage to the Museum site for display and interpretation to the attending public.



PGFSO's Replicated Conestoga Wagon - Ready to Go

Apple Fest - contd.

In early September an evening sauerkraut bee was held at Paul & Ann Reesor's On the Hill Farm in Markham to fill a number of 10 gallon crocks with cabbage and salt to ferment for sale at the Museum. Pails of apple butter was ordered from Wellesley to be repackaged and add to our sauerkraut that we offered for sale. We canvassed our group and found a number who had previous fritter production experience and were willing to join the Historical Society veterans. MHS president Sue Smitko and her crew looked after the getting the fryers and production and serving equipment to site and ensuring that adequate inventories of the secret fritter "batter" were on hand. The apples were sourced to the Museum by Algoma Apples. In addition to the "fritter apples", there were enough of these juicy gems to produce over 700 2-litre jugs of pressed cider for public sale that day,

Saturday September 23rd dawned sunny and clear, always an added blessing for outdoor fall events.

The fritter production and sales area was set up in the northeast corner of the Museum's historic cider mill building adjacent to the Heritage Orchard. This 50 tree orchard is comprised of approximately 22 cultivated varieties (cultivars)

At 8 am sharp the crew of approximately 16 workers, including the PGFSO "sous chefs" split up to cover the various divisions of production : the apples washers, the "coring crew", the slicing crew, the battering crew and the deep fry crew.

Let's not forget the icing sugar or maple syrup topping folks. There was also a good back up crew of experienced veteran "Supervisors" to provide support.



Lois Reesor & Doug Groat Frying Fritters

Attendance for the event was just over 1700 people came through the gates. Due to Covid19 and related restrictions this was the first time since 2019 that fritters were being offered as a part of Apple Fest and so many of those visitors came specifically to sample the much missed apple fritters. It was affirming to be able to lend support to the Markham Historical Society and to work in cooperation with them.

A bonus was to have an opportunity to share the stories and history of the Conestoga Wagon excursions of the early pioneers from Pennsylvania to various Upper Canada settlements around 1800. Our story boards and the wagon itself provide great opportunities to broaden the knowledge of so many new arrivals to Canada who are eager to discover how this country and our community were founded and developed. We were located beside the fritter area, an ideal location for our apple butter and sauerkraut sales. Sales were good.

Thanks again to the MHS for this invitation to engage and be involved in this day. We'd likely entertain an invite next year is that's feasible.



Quality Control – Lois Reesor, Esther Lewis, Louise Pogue



Happy Apple fritter customers

Annual Sausage and Sauerkraut Dinner

By Dave Burkholder

Our fall annual sausage and sauerkraut dinner was held on the usual last Saturday of the month November 28th at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall in Cedar Grove. This was the second year we've held this dinner since a number of years off due to Covid-19 and its related public gathering and meeting restrictions. Attendees filled the lobby well before the 6:30 seating time, renewing their annual memberships and enjoying visits with old friends with the aromas of roasting sausage floating in the air.

The doors opened on time and 100 hungry diners quickly moved into the hall, jockeying to find a dinner place at the circular tables. When folks had found a seat President Paul Reesor welcomed everyone. He called on Shirley Stafford to lead the group in a few moments of remembrance for those members and friends who have passed on in the last year. Ann Reesor led the group in singing O Canada and we raised our cider glasses in a toast to the King. Esther Lewis asked a prayer of blessing on our time together and offered a prayer of thanks for the food prepared.



Diners awaiting their turn for Sausage

Tables were invited in turn to move to the central buffet table to be served the delicious meal of roasted sausage, sauerkraut, mixed vegetables, mashed potatoes and gravy by the caterer and his experienced crew. While diners waited for their table turn to be called they enjoyed appetizers of fresh sauerkraut, apple butter, cottage cheese and fresh rolls and with butter. Everyone was served within 15 minutes and were invited to return for seconds if they wished which many did.

Plates were cleared with our President prompting diners to keep their dinner forks as they were now "dessert" forks. Guests were invited by table -in reverse order from dinner- to the pie buffet where a choice of cherry, blueberry, strawberry, apple and pumpkin pies awaited them. Many of the pies were baked by Heather Mussleman.

Coffee & tea was served with dessert. A number of diners ventured back for seconds on the pie!! Lois Reesor thanked Dan Burkholder and his catering team for once again providing us with an amazing meal.



Pie advisors Jacob and Clayton Reesor



The Pie buffet

The group were then invited to retire to the auditorium for some interesting historical findings from our guest speaker, George Duncan. George gave a presentation about some old buildings in Markham that he is researching for the city. He has returned to work after two and a half years of retirement to assist with a special project to research over 150 properties to help establish priorities for heritage designation. A few of the buildings he spoke about included the grand old house at David Reesor Jr.'s Silver Springs Farm in Cedar Grove, the old Box Grove General Store, and a house once owned by Frederick K. Reesor, also in Box Grove, which may have been built around the first schoolhouse in that community.

George then entertained a number of questions from the audience. Lois Reesor thanked him on behalf of the group and presented him a gift basket containing various pioneer treats; maple syrup, apple butter and sauerkraut.

Ann Reesor led the group in a parting hymn and President Paul dismissed us with an invitation to the next dinner, tentatively planned for November 30, 2024. It was encouraging to see many first time attendees at this event. Thank you to all who attended and supported us in making this dinner a great success.

Reesor Meetinghouse in Fall Splendor



Reesor Meetinghouse – York_Durham Townline



Reesor Church Cemetery– Blazing Maples

Pioneer Remedies- from 1991 PGFSO Vol XII –
“At Your Own Risk” compiled by Lorne R. Smith
 With the cold & cough season in full swing; here are a
 number of several cough remedies found in this book.

Cough Remedy pg. 2.

½ pint best brandy, Juice of 6 lemons,
 ½ pint honey,
 ¼ lb. rock candy crushed,
 ¼ lb. loaf sugar,
 ¼ lb. horehound candy,
 ½ oz. licorice,
 Mix well together.

Dose: Take one tablespoon 3 times daily.

Remedies continued:

Burkholder Lily Medicine: Good for all ailments. Pg. 20

*One quart alcohol, put in lily leaves till it is full, hang in the sun
 for six weeks, then take out the leaves and put in:*

*½ oz. aloes,
 ½ oz. camphor,
 ½ oz. opium,
 ¼ oz. saffron.*

Then it is ready for use.

This old remedy was also commercialized.

*The following description was taken from a bottle labelled as
 Burkholder’s Lily Medicine:*

*“ Prepared by Houston’s Drug Store, Stouffville, Ontario.
 For Man or Beast. Can be used internally or externally for
 relief of Pain, Sore Mouth, Swelling, Bruises, Cuts, Sore Gums
 after extraction.*

May be used with a little water for internal use if desired.

***Dose: Half to one teaspoon every two hours,
 children according to age.”***

*Editor’s note: there may be a family connection to this concoction. I
 cannot say for certain but it may have been a remedy that my
 grandfather L.J. Burkholder may have developed.*

**The Witch Next Door
 By Catherine Brydon**

The grade eight boys had pushed our desks to the edges of the classroom leaving a large area for the party in the centre. All eight grades had decorated the room for Halloween with white ghosts, black cats and witches on broomsticks. Orange and black crepe paper twisted gaily over our heads. We had planned the party down to every last detail including the costumes we would wear. There were the usual tramps and hobos but one little guy with a box on his torso was a convincing television set with rabbit ears perched on top. This was the 1960s so rabbit ears were a necessity away from the city. Milling around the classroom were Little Bo Peep, Superman, Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz and Anne Boleyn with ‘er ‘ead tucked underneath her arm.

The big day had finally arrived when all 30 students in our one-room school could parade our costumes before our mothers and an impartial judge. We had been coached on how to serve cold cider and cookies to our guests and afterward our mothers would take us home in time to get ready to go out trick or treating in the evening. We were excitedly guessing who was behind each other’s masks when suddenly whispers rippled around the room.

“Did you see the witch?”

“Who is that dressed as a witch?”

“No it is a real witch – that is not a costume,” someone said.

Cont....

... cont. The Witch Next Door

Standing at the door was a stranger. The woman had wiry, steel grey hair chopped off at her chin and wore a loose, shapeless dress with a black coat overtop. She had a few teeth missing and a big mole on her chin. Surely there was no other explanation – she was a real witch who had come to our Halloween party! The younger children appeared to be quite frightened by the stranger and clung to their mothers' skirts. Older students kept their distance staring in disbelief. But I knew the truth about the witch.

The "witch" was my neighbour, Mrs. Lilly. The Lilly family had moved into the old Peter Reesor homestead down the lane from our house. Owned by Harold Coakwell of Box Grove, it and was being rented out while he made plans to convert the large house into apartments.

The Lillys were a mysterious family having moved around a lot most recently coming from Claremont. Two grown-up sons who neither worked nor attended school drove souped-up cars past our house, leaving behind huge clouds of dust. You never wanted to accept a ride with Tommy or Hughie Lilly no matter how late you were or how far you had to go. Rumour was they had guns in the back seat. They had a sister my age with whom I was allowed to play but only at my house. I was forbidden to eat anything from their kitchen – though I would not have wanted to. There were no toilets and the chamber pots outside each bedroom were not emptied regularly.

Frequently Mrs. Lilly came to our door asking "a favour". "Can you spare some flour?" Mrs. Lilly would ask. "Certainly", said mom. "How much do you need?" "Oh, just a five pound bag."

Mother would give her all our flour. The same thing happened with sugar, butter, bread. Soon the requests escalated to using our phone. I realized years later that my mother was afraid of her and would give her anything she asked. Our telephone was on a desk in our large kitchen with a comfortable chair beside it.

Mrs. Lilly would sit down and make her calls – most being long distance because of our rural location. Several calls and over an hour later, Mrs. Lilly stirred from the easy chair and left a quarter on the desk "to cover the charges". Then she would be gone until the next time.

My mother became very agitated about Mrs. Lilly's visits but was too fearful to tell her not to take advantage of us anymore. She kept thinking about the guns in the cars fearing that one day she would find our dog dead on her doorstep – or worse.

She mentioned these visits to her friend Blodwen Davies who researched local history and Mennonite folklore. After listening carefully to my mother's experiences, Blodwen said, "I think Mrs. Lilly is a witch. Do you want to know how to get rid of her?" My mother quietly nodded, yes. Blodwen's research showed that the early settlers repelled witches with salt. She suggested mother sprinkle a circle of salt under the easy chair and wait for the next time Mrs. Lilly came to use the phone. "Watch what she does and tell me what happens."

As expected, Mrs. Lilly knocked on the door a few days later and asked to make a call to Toronto.

"Of course, come right in," my mother said. She then went into an adjoining room and watched. Mrs. Lilly went to the phone and dialed the number. She turned and looked at the easy chair but did not sit. She paced around the chair during her call and ended it abruptly. She made no further calls that day. Quickly and silently, she left our house. As soon as she was out of sight, mother called Blodwen.

"She did not sit down! She was very uncomfortable and left after just a few minutes, mom reported.

"Good", said Blodwen. Now put a line of salt across your threshold." This was done immediately and replenished as needed. Mrs. Lilly came back in a few days asking for some baking supplies.

"Of course, said mother. Would you like to step inside while you wait?"

"No – I'll stay here on the porch," Mrs. Lilly said tersely. She took the supplies and never came to our door again. A few months later the family moved away to a location unknown.

Update on the Peter Reesor Home

The Peter Reesor homestead, built in the early 1830s, was converted to three apartments in the mid-1960s and still stands today, protected by being in Bob Hunter Park, part of the Rouge National Urban Park. It is owned by the Ontario Realty Corporation. One of the original tenants, John and Marilyn Williams, still live there. The generously proportioned stone house overlooks the Little Rouge River and Rouge Valley Mennonite Church. A large imposing barn had the date 1831 visible on a board at its peak but it burned to the ground in 1960. Pat and Don McClennan bought the Bismark Reesor house to the north of the homestead in 1949 and their daughter Catherine Brydon was born there. The McClennans refused to sell to the Ontario government and Catherine sold it to the present owners in 2000.



The Bismark Reesor / Pat & Don McClennan House – Cedar Grove

Editor's note: Cathy Brydon submitted the following story to me back in the late summer before this edition morphed in to a Fall / Winter issue. Here is your "Halloween" scary input to temper the winter outside.