



# Easter Eggs

**SYMBOLS OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL**

**A COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION**

**GLENCAIRN MUSEUM, BRYN ATHYN, PENNSYLVANIA**

**PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN CULTURAL HERITAGE CENTER, KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY**

**MARCH 2 - MAY 5, 2024**



A COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION  
Glencairn Museum, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University  
March 2 - May 5, 2024

*Easter Eggs: Symbols of Rebirth & Renewal is a collaborative exhibition produced by Glencairn Museum and the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University. Glencairn invites a diverse audience to engage with religious beliefs and practices, past and present, with the goal of fostering empathy and building understanding among people of all beliefs. The exhibition features Easter eggs and artifacts from the cultural collections at the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, as well as the private collections of Elaine Vardjan and Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal.*



This exhibition catalog is dedicated with gratitude to the memory of Dr. Don Yoder, (1921-2015), Father of the American Folklife Studies movement in the United States, whose contributions to the research of Pennsylvania's Easter traditions have fostered and greatly enhanced the folk-cultural content of this exhibition.

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# EASTER EGGS

## SYMBOLS OF REBIRTH & RENEWAL

By Patrick J. Donmoyer

Throughout the ages, the egg has captured the imagination of humanity in cultures and religions across the world as a symbol of the mystery of creation and the reawakening of the earth at springtime. Among the earliest surviving examples of human artistic traditions, decorated eggs have played a significant and perennial role in folk-cultural practices and religious expression up to the present day. Although the earliest written evidence of decorated eggs associated with the Christian celebration of Easter dates to the Middle Ages, this tradition was not simply a spontaneous development, but one that was shaped and influenced by a wide range of cultural practices throughout human history.

In a similar manner Pennsylvania's vibrant Easter egg traditions emerge from a mosaic of diverse communities that have shaped and been shaped by broader transatlantic immigrant culture in America. The origins of decorating, blessing, and eating eggs as part of the religious celebration of the Paschal Feast in Pennsylvania can be traced to the arrival of several waves of immigrant groups

beginning in the eighteenth century. Today Easter eggs have become a ubiquitous American tradition. Pennsylvania was the gateway for these traditions to enter North American culture, and continues to play a significant role as these cultural expressions evolve and new generations of Americans rediscover and explore their roots.



German-speaking immigrants to Pennsylvania were the very first to establish a robust Easter egg tradition in North America.<sup>1</sup> This transatlantic immigration gave rise to the popular Easter traditions that many Americans cherish today—decorated eggs, the Easter rabbit, Easter baskets, and egg hunts — all of which blend sacred and secular elements in contemporary celebrations of springtime. Later nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrations of families from Central and Eastern Europe brought their own unique Easter egg expressions to the Coal Region of Northeastern Pennsylvania, and to urban centers, such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. For more than three centuries, these traditions have continued to flourish and diversify throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A Traditional Pennsylvania Dutch Pin-Scratched Goose Egg, Pennsylvania, nineteenth century, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. This goose egg features sophisticated arrangements of floral and bird motifs, representing one of the most elaborate Pennsylvania Dutch scratched eggs to have survived from the nineteenth century. It was preserved by Joseph Kindig Jr. of York, Pennsylvania, who began collecting in the 1920s and became an influential expert in the material culture of the Mid-Atlantic.

## MYTHS OF CREATION AND RITUALS OF RENEWAL

Human cultures have long admired the beauty and perfection of the egg, and marveled as new life hatches forth from the shell in springtime. Long before eggs were associated with the celebration of Easter, this mystery of nature came to represent new life and the reawakening of the earth each spring as a sacred symbol. The three-part structure of the egg, with its uniformly round shell, watery albumen, and brilliant yellow yolk, inspired stories of the creation of the earth, the oceans, and the sun in many religious traditions. The miraculous womb of the cosmic egg from which all life proceeds is a concept that appears in myths and sacred texts throughout human history.<sup>2</sup>

The oldest known written record of a mythological cosmic egg from which all life on earth proceeds is an ancient Egyptian manuscript from the New Kingdom Period (1580-1085 BCE), which praises the world-egg brought forth from the waters of nothingness by eight primeval deities: “O Egg of the water, source of the earth, product of the Eight, great in heaven and great in the underworld... I came forth with thee from the water, I came forth with thee from thine rest.”<sup>3</sup> The egg contained the creator deity Atum, who fashioned the world from a mound of earth that emerged from the waters of chaos.<sup>4</sup> In other versions of this creation story, it is the sun god Re who hatches from the egg,<sup>5</sup> while still others suggest that the world-egg was laid by the goose Geb known as “the Great Cackler,” or the ibis associated with the god Thoth.



Ancient Egyptian ceramic egg in the Glencairn Museum collection, Provenance and date unknown. This egg-shaped ceramic object in the Egyptian collection at Glencairn Museum, formerly part of the Academy of the New Church's museum for at least a century, raises questions for researchers. It may be an ovoid juglet with a broken spout. However, its distinctive egg shape could hold symbolic meaning. According to two different versions of the Egyptian creation myth, the god who shaped the world hatched from a Cosmic Egg laid by either the celestial goose (known as the “Great Cackler”) or by the ibis associated with the god Thoth.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead includes many poetic incantations invoking the cosmic egg: “I have guarded this egg of the Great Cackler. If it grows, I will grow; if it lives, I will live; if it breathes the air, I will breathe the air.”<sup>6</sup> It is significant that the cosmic egg of the world's beginning also appears in these funerary texts, which served as a guide to souls navigating the afterlife. This is one of many instances throughout human history where eggs play a role not only in the symbolism of creation, but also in death and the hope of rebirth.

Paralleling the Egyptian creation stories, the Hindu creator god Brahma hatches forth from the *Brahmanda* (the cosmic egg), also called the *Hiranyagarbha* (golden embryo), which floats in the waters of creation. Among the oldest of the Hindu sacred texts is the *Chandogya Upanishad*, which describes the cosmic egg as hatching into two pieces, one silver and one gold, which became the earth and sky.<sup>7</sup> Later writings such as the *Visnu Parana* and *Brahmanda Purana* describe that after a period of one thousand years of incubation, Brahma emerges from the seven-layered egg shell to create the universe, the sun, moon, and planets; the oceans, continents, and mountains; as well as the animals and humans— all from the matter of the egg.<sup>8</sup>

The *Nihon Shoki* (*Japanese Chronicles*) from 720 CE describe a similar creation story in which a cosmic egg was formed of the undifferentiated feminine and



masculine principles, In and Yo, which separated to form the heavens and the earth.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, in some variations of the Orphic creation myths of the ancient Greeks, the cosmic egg is separated into two halves that form the earth and sky.<sup>10</sup> Considered the first Greek religious movement to produce sacred texts,<sup>11</sup> the poetry of the Orphic traditions describes that in the beginning there was a watery abyss. Time, personified as a serpent or dragon and moved by Necessity, produces Aether and together with Chaos, gives birth to a cosmic egg. The serpent Time squeezes the egg, and hatches forth the shining creator god Phanes, both male and female, who gives birth to the gods, and thus all of creation.<sup>12</sup>

It is this ubiquitous notion of the cosmic egg, combining feminine and masculine forces and thus all of material existence, that inspired philosophers and later alchemists to envision the *prima materia* or first matter as the source of the four elements, containing within it the opportunity of the perfection of nature in the philosopher's stone.<sup>13</sup>

A celebrated white marble relief at the Galleria Estense, Modena, depicts the hatched solar god standing within the celestial and terrestrial hemispheres of the cosmic egg—one crowning their head and the other supporting their feet, while a serpent forms a spiral around their body. Echoing the shape of the cosmic egg, an ovoid aureole containing the twelve signs of the zodiac delimits the celestial sphere, and personifications of the four winds gaze from each corner.<sup>14</sup>



Roman marble relief of Phanes-Mithras hatching from the cosmic egg, forming the heavens and the earth from the eggshell, surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac and the four winds. Italy Emilia Romagna Modena: Estense Gallery. Alamy Stock Photo: Claudio Pagliarani.

The Modena relief is presumed to be a Roman syncretic work from the second century CE, likely equating the Orphic god Phanes with Mithras, a solar god who also hatched from the cosmic egg.<sup>15</sup> Archaeologists have long observed parallels between the stories of Mithras and Jesus in the observation of their birth on December 25,<sup>16</sup> although perhaps the most unexpected of these instances is a carved stone fountain in Alsleben bei Zerst, Germany, depicting the resurrected Christ emerging not from a stone tomb, but from the shell of an egg, as a symbol of rebirth.<sup>17</sup>

While this particular artistic rendering of the cosmic egg is highly unusual for Christian art, it serves as a visual parallel to the egg's symbolic role in stories of both the creation of the cosmos, as well as the renewal of the world through rebirth. This association of the egg with resurrection is likewise a feature of many cultures, featured especially in the rich imagery of funerary arts and practices of ancient cultures throughout the world.

Archaeologists discovered Ostrich eggs in ancient Egyptian tombs of the Predynastic Period dating to the fourth millennium BCE, including both plain and highly decorated examples.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is uncertain whether these eggs were meant to be interpreted literally as food offerings to the dead, as functional containers, or specific symbolic objects, their sustained presence in burials throughout Egypt and beyond into the Mediterranean and Western Asia suggest a direct connection with religious veneration of the dead and hopes for an afterlife.

In the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun, who reigned from 1347-1337 BCE, a sculptural lid of a funerary jar depicts a young goose with four unhatched eggs, likely referencing the creation story of the Great Cackler and the cosmic egg.<sup>19</sup> Ostrich eggs cut into the shape of libation cups appear in Mesopotamian gravesites at Kish from 3000 BCE, and ostrich eggs also appear as funeral offerings in Assyrian graves at Assur from 2000 BCE.<sup>20</sup> Similar ostrich egg bowls dating to the second or third century BCE were discovered in Los Millares, Spain.<sup>21</sup>

Recent archaeological discoveries of decorated ostrich eggshell fragments at the Diepkloof Rock Shelter in Western Cape, South Africa, dating from roughly 60,000-75,000 years ago, suggest that the decoration of eggs is perhaps humanity's oldest surviving artistic tradition. To scientists, this discovery at Diepkloof is the earliest known example of human decoration and "constitutes the most reliable collection of an early graphic tradition."<sup>22</sup> The colorful egg fragments display a wide range of patterns etched into the surface of the shell that may hold symbolic or functional significance in addition to artistic expression.

These earliest decorated eggs are reminders that humanity's story has been interwoven with the egg in both sacred and mundane contexts long before the advent of agriculture and urban settlements. The consumption of eggs by humans is a practice inherited from our hominid ancestors, dating back millions of years.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the widespread domestication of chickens in the Neolithic period first developed in

China, the eggs of quail and other related species such as pigeons were eaten by hunter-gatherers, and these birds were among the first to be domesticated following the establishment of cities.<sup>24</sup> According to the Book of Exodus, great migrations of quail fed Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years,<sup>25</sup> and quail were prized for their eggs and meat in Ancient Egypt, where the birds were depicted in art, both as the hieroglyphic letter 'w' and in images of migrating flocks in natural habitats.<sup>26</sup> Later, the Egyptians were the first culture to develop robust egg incubation techniques using wood-fired brick ovens, which not only increased flocks of domesticated fowl, but dazzled visiting foreigners who marveled at the process.<sup>27</sup>



Like the ancient art of the Egyptians, eggs also appear in burial paintings of the Etruscans dating from the eighth to the third centuries BCE. Here the egg plays an enigmatic roll, depicted in a ritual of passing eggs from one figure to the next. Archaeologists have also discovered decorated scratched ostrich eggs, as well as eggs etched onto funerary mirrors, painted on pottery urns, and ritually roasted in braziers by tombs, presumably as both offerings to the dead and as food for mourners.<sup>28</sup> Funerary statues from the third century BCE in Boeotia depict the Greek god Dionysus holding an egg and a rooster,<sup>29</sup> as if begging the age-old question: "Which came first?" Funerary vases at Athens depict baskets of eggs left on graves as offerings to the deceased, and in keeping with traditions of holding annual meals of remembrance at grave sites. Similar feasts are documented in ancient reliefs in Syria.<sup>30</sup>

Robin's eggs and nest, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Human traditions of egg decoration draw inspiration from the colorful eggs of birds worldwide. Robin's eggs are among the most brightly colored, and robin migrations signify the arrival of spring. In European art, robins are linked to the Paschal (Easter) mystery, their red breast symbolizing Christ's blood. According to some legends, a robin's breast turned red when it felt compassion and tried to remove thorns from Christ's crown, but in doing so, pricked its own breast.

Even today among the Kurdish Yazidis, the New Year's celebration on "Red Wednesday" in mid-April is signified with the ancient practice of dyeing eggs, which are exchanged and also placed on family graves. This practice is based in the Yazidi belief that the world was hatched from an egg by an archangel in the form of a peacock.<sup>31</sup> At the celebration, eggs are cracked together in games to simulate the birth of the world from the egg. The Persian celebration of the new year is also celebrated with the dyeing of eggs, and according to some is called "The Festival of Red Eggs."<sup>32</sup>

It is clear that even for ancient cultures that did not venerate their dead with devotional offerings, eggs still featured prominently as both ritual foods and symbols of renewal. According to Jewish tradition, eggs and bread were eaten at meals of condolence (*seudat havrah*) following burial of the dead as food to comfort the mourners.<sup>33</sup> In some Jewish communities, such as those in Morocco, "mourning eggs" were dyed with onion skins and eaten at *Sukkot* or the autumn Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, hard boiled eggs dipped in ashes are eaten as part of an old Ashkenazi custom before fasting on the holy day of *Tisha B'Av*, observed in remembrance of the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

Eggs also played a significant role in the celebration of *pesach* or Passover, which celebrates the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. At the Passover Seder meal, a roasted egg called the *betzah* represents the *hagigah* or burnt offerings prior to the destruction of the temple.<sup>36</sup> It appears, however, that for both the Seder and *Tisha B'Av*, eggs not only represented the loss of the Temple and the ritual of the burnt offering, but also a sense of hope in transformative renewal.<sup>37</sup> Some Jewish traditions

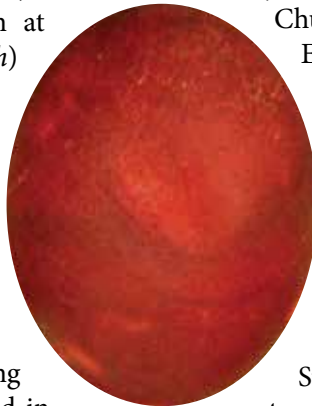
point to the roundness of the egg as a symbol of hope, as well as the cycle of life and renewal.<sup>38</sup>

It is perhaps precisely this dual meaning, as both a food of mourning and hope for renewal, that eggs first appear in early Christian legends of the Resurrection. As devout Jews, Jesus and his disciples celebrated the feast of Passover according to the biblical narratives on the night before his arrest by the Romans, and subsequent Crucifixion the following day. Among Eastern Orthodox Christians, the name for the celebration of Easter as *Paska* (Ukraine) and *Pascha* (Greece) takes its name from the Hebrew *Pesach*, and is the origin of the word "Paschal" used to alternately describe both Passover and Easter traditions. This overlap dates back to the time when early Christians, especially those of the Byzantine Church of the East, continued to celebrate Easter at the time of the Jewish Passover.

It was not until the Council of Nicea in 325 CE that the observation of Easter was no longer reckoned according to the Jewish calendar for both Roman and Byzantine Christians.<sup>39</sup>

Orthodox Christians and some Catholics attribute the origin of the Easter egg to a miracle observed by St. Mary Magdalene, who was the first to witness the Resurrection in the Gospel narratives.<sup>40</sup> According to tradition, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and brought a basket of hard boiled eggs as the traditional food of mourning. To her surprise, she found that the stone had already been rolled away and the eggs in her basket had miraculously transformed to the colors of the rainbow.<sup>41</sup>

Another story describes that Mary Magdalene presented an egg to the Roman Emperor Tiberius in an attempt to spread the news of Christ's Resurrection. The emperor replied that a human could no more rise from the dead than the egg in her hand could turn



Red egg, dyed with onion skins, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Eggs dyed red played significant roles in religions and cultures throughout the ancient world, including the Jews, Greeks, Persians, Chinese, and later by Yazidi Kurds and Christians. Typically dyed with onion skins and a small amount of vinegar to bind the dye to the shell, the eggs were hard boiled in the dye, and remained edible with a touch of onion flavor to the egg. This is also the traditional way to dye eggs among the Pennsylvania Dutch, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians.



red, and at once the egg was said to turn crimson red.<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that Eastern Orthodox icons of St. Mary Magdalene depict the saint holding a bright crimson egg. Eggs also play a role in other forms of veneration of St. Mary Magdalene, where an unusual pilgrimage site in France is called *Grotte aux Oeufs* (the Cave of Eggs), and is located in the mountains of Sainte-Baume in Provence, not far from an official shrine where, according to legend, St. Mary Magdalene spent her final days after fleeing Palestine.<sup>43</sup>

In other traditions, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary as the source of the Easter egg tradition, who brings a basket of eggs to the foot of the cross, where she begs for mercy for her crucified son, and the drops of his blood turn the eggs red.<sup>44</sup> A different legend suggests that Mary decorated eggs at the time of the Nativity, reinforcing the common Eastern Orthodox practice of depicting the Madonna and Child on Easter eggs.<sup>45</sup> Yet another legend suggests that the Virgin Mary's tears of joy colored a basket of eggs brought to her as food of comfort when she learned of her son's Resurrection.<sup>46</sup>



It is likely that these legends are not of antiquity but of late arrival to Christianity as a way to differentiate the practice of decorating eggs among Christians from the many cultures that also decorate eggs at springtime. As indicated by the sheer proliferation of egg myths and egg decoration traditions throughout the world, such practices would not have been out of the ordinary.

As evidence of this ubiquity, throughout the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East, ostrich eggs were historically suspended in houses of worship across many faiths, including mosques, Coptic Christian churches in Egypt, and Greek Orthodox Churches, where a variety of stories explain their appearance as symbolic of various theological concepts or as serving a ritual function to bless those who enter the sacred space.<sup>47</sup> Among such holy locations was the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, where ostrich eggs were historically suspended as a symbol

of the Resurrection.<sup>48</sup> In some instances, ostrich eggs were produced in porcelain, such as those which once hung at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, Egypt. Some have suggested that these

St. Mary Magdalene and the egg, Ukrainian Orthodox icon, 2023, Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer, Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Some Orthodox Christians and Catholics attribute the origin of the Easter egg to a miracle by St. Mary Magdalene, the first witness to the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospel narratives. According to tradition, Mary Magdalene presented an egg to the Roman Emperor Tiberius to spread the news of the Resurrection. The emperor responded that a human could no more rise from the dead than the egg in her hand could turn red. But the egg reportedly turned crimson red instantly. In other stories, Mary Magdalene brought a basket of hard boiled eggs to hold vigil at the tomb of Jesus. When she arrived, she found the stone that had covered the tomb rolled away, and the eggs in her basket had turned red.



ceramic eggs served as counterweights for hanging lamps, while others have inferred a dual function as exotic objects of value and as religious symbols of devotion and rebirth.<sup>49</sup>

An Italian fresco at the Tomb of Antonio de Fissiraga (d. 1327) in Lodi, Lombardy, depicts an ostrich egg, either natural or ceramic, hanging from a chain above the seated Madonna and Child, to whom Fissiraga presents the image of a church, accompanied by St. Francis and another saint.<sup>50</sup> Ostrich eggs have also appeared on official historical church inventories of liturgical items, including two at St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome by a donation of Pope Leo IV (847-855),<sup>51</sup> and later in the shrine of the powerful Medici family in Florence in 1492.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the Middle Ages, the use of eggs as significant focal points in sacred architecture continued and may have even influenced aspects of liturgical practice. In Germany, ostrich eggs were placed on a representation of the holy tomb in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil mass, mirroring those documented at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Priests would take the eggs and place them on the altar while intoning the Paschal greeting at midnight: "Christ is Risen," met with the congregations reply, "He is risen indeed." This signified the beginning of the Easter celebration, and the end of the Lenten fast. Such practices were historically associated with Cathedrals in the German cities of Mainz and Halle, and even continued into the eighteenth century at Cathedrals in Rheims and Rouen.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the development of the egg's role in the Easter celebration lies in its historical ritual prohibition during the season on Lent, and the subsequent blessing of eggs at the Easter Vigil. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) established the Lenten fast as a time when "...we abstain from flesh meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese, and eggs";<sup>54</sup> and the period of the fast eventually encompassed the 40 day period extending from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, when the Easter Vigil was held. The liturgy of the vigil included special provisions for the blessing of eggs, salt, and bread, which were brought to church to be consecrated and subsequently eaten to break the Lenten fast:

"Lord, let the grace of your blessing + come upon these eggs, that they be healthful food for your faithful who eat them in thanksgiving for the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen."<sup>55</sup>

Eggs blessed in church were distributed in the community, and Christians of both Eastern and Western traditions placed eggs on family altars as a blessing to the home, concealed them in agricultural buildings, and ate them as rituals for health and well-being.<sup>56</sup> Cracking games, practiced by children and adults, made use of the abundance of eggs prepared for the celebration, and the cracking of eggs symbolized a celebratory "hatching" of new life and the coming of spring.

It was a common custom dating to antiquity to dye such eggs red in onion skins as part of the Paschal celebration, but the decoration of



Ostrich egg, Private Collection of Becca Munro, Harleysville, Pennsylvania. In the Mediterranean and the Middle East, it was a tradition to hang ostrich eggs from the ceilings of religious places, including mosques, Egyptian Christian (Coptic) churches, and Greek Orthodox churches. These eggs symbolized theological ideas or served to bless those entering sacred spaces. In some cases, the ostrich eggs were made from porcelain, like the ones that decorate hanging lamps at St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai.

eggs does not appear in written texts until the thirteenth century, when two references from the Slavic and German cultures appear. Archbishop of Kraków, Wincenty Kadłubek (1160-1223), writes of the turmoil in Poland, that “since antiquity, the Poles...play with their lords as if they were painted eggs.”<sup>57</sup> In 1216 CE, German poet Freidanck penned the lines in Middle High German: “*Ein kint næme ein geverwet ei vür ungeverweter eier zwei*” (A child takes one colored egg, [but] for uncolored eggs, [the child takes] two).<sup>58</sup>

In both early texts, the authors refer to decorated eggs in mundane terms, indicating that the practice was commonplace. It is perhaps small wonder then, that archaeological discoveries of decorated ceramic eggs and colored egg shells in Ostrówiek, Poland from ca. 1000 CE, and colored ceramic eggs at Worms, Germany from 320 CE, suggest that such practices had been well established among both Germanic and Slavic peoples, even prior to Christianity.<sup>59</sup> Despite innumerable changes in cultural attitudes, materials, techniques, and significance, the tradition of decorating eggs has continued to grow and evolve in communities throughout Eastern and Western Europe.

Immigrants eventually brought these traditions to North America, where they flourished in folk-cultural communities spread throughout Pennsylvania. As the most ethnically and religiously diverse of the original thirteen colonies, Pennsylvania provided a safe haven for immigrants whose traditions continue to flavor the diversity of the commonwealth to the present day.

## PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH EASTER EGGS

Prior to the American Revolution, 81,000 emigrants from the German-speaking regions of Central Europe established communities in early Pennsylvania before spreading throughout North America.<sup>60</sup> Known by their English-speaking neighbors as the Pennsylvania Dutch, these immigrants brought their distinctive language, religious traditions, and seasonal customs to North America, where they both contributed to and were shaped by the blossoming of a new American identity. Their cultural influence is still visible today through the widespread adoption of holiday customs that later rose to popularity in the United States, especially those of Christmas and Easter. Among these, Easter eggs and the Easter rabbit stand out as two distinctive contributions to American culture.

Although many Anglo-American traditions are echoes of the British colonial past of early America, comparatively few of the quintessentially American holiday expressions, such as those of Easter and Christmas, find their origins in the British Isles. German cultural expressions, such as the Easter rabbit and Easter egg hunts, though popular today, were once considered foreign, unfashionable, or alternately too Catholic or too secular for the tastes of the Quakers, Presbyterians, Puritans,



A Traditional Pennsylvania Dutch Scratched Goose Egg, by Peter V. Fritsch, Longswamp, Berks County, ca. 2005, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. This scratched goose egg features the artist Peter Fritsch's signature image of a bird poised on a flowering branch, as well as the blossoming of an intricate sunflower at the top, and a rosette on the bottom—all traditional motifs of the Pennsylvania Dutch.





Pennsylvania Dutch Easter eggs by Peter V. Fritsch, ca. 1975–2010, Longswamp, Berks County. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, Gift of Peter V. Fritsch. The prolific Pennsylvania Dutch artist and poet Peter V. Fritsch (1945–2015) created these Easter eggs as part of his annual tradition of handcrafting tokens of appreciation for his friends and family. Rooted in both traditional and contemporary artistic expressions, Fritsch's work evokes the connection of local culture with the land and the cycles of the seasons. His work features depictions of birds, plants, and creatures of the earth, along with geometric motifs inspired by stars and religious symbols. Using a variety of scratched and painted techniques, Peter Fritsch's work embodied both the continuity and evolution of Pennsylvania Dutch Easter egg traditions.

and some sectarian communities in Pennsylvania. As Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker observed: "It must be remembered that the vast majority of the early British settlers in the Commonwealth—the English Quakers, and the Presbyterian Scotch-Irish—did not celebrate Easter. In fact, they 'shunned' it."<sup>61</sup> These Easter traditions nevertheless spread throughout the North American continent by way of the German-speaking immigrant communities, setting the stage for a new American expression of holiday traditions that would grow and change over many generations.

As a predominantly Protestant culture, Pennsylvania Dutch communities were composed of roughly 95 percent members of Lutheran and Reformed congregations, while just 4 percent were members of sectarian Anabaptist and pietist groups, including the Mennonites, Amish, Brethren,

Moravians, and Schwenkfelders. Less than one percent were Roman Catholics. As a result, the official religious expressions of the Pennsylvania Dutch were considerably less liturgical than their communities of origin in Europe, yet their folk-culture was still deeply rooted in centuries-old, pre-Reformation beliefs and observances associated with the old liturgical and agricultural calendar.<sup>62</sup> Easter eggs therefore made no official appearance in early Pennsylvania churches but were relegated to the home, where eggs were gathered in large quantities in the weeks leading up to Easter to be dyed, scratched to produce elaborate designs, and given as gifts among friends and family on Easter Sunday.<sup>63</sup> Although not formally cultivated by the church, Protestants, Anabaptists, and Pietist religious groups in Pennsylvania decorated eggs as part of their annual Easter celebrations.

## GOOD FRIDAY EGGS

It is uncertain whether eggs were ever brought into the sanctuaries of early German Catholic or Episcopalian churches in Pennsylvania as tradition would have dictated in Europe, where portions of the Easter meal, including eggs, bread, and salt, were blessed at the Easter Vigil, and even sprinkled with holy water in the early days.<sup>64</sup> Originally intended to bless food for actual consumption, according to tradition, congregants sometimes kept small samples of such consecrated eggs, salt, and bread long after Easter in households across Europe. The eggs were considered useful for a wide range of practical concerns, including healing, protection, and divination. Eggs laid on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday that were dyed red and blessed in the church were often kept hidden or displayed in household shrines to protect the home. Some of these eggs were inscribed or decorated with crosses to enhance their potency as sacred objects.<sup>65</sup>

These unofficial, folk-cultural European beliefs and practices provide insight into American customs among the Protestant Pennsylvania Dutch communities in Pennsylvania, where acts of ritual consecration no longer occurred in church during Lent and Holy Week, but took place on an unofficial, folk-cultural level at home and on the farm as sacred expressions for blessing, protecting, and promoting the well-being of humans, animals, and cultivated plants.

When the Lenten season commenced on Ash Wednesday, not only were ashes applied to the foreheads

of the faithful in church, but farmers also dusted their cattle, gardens, and even the perimeter of homes with ashes from the woodstove to drive away parasites, insects, rodents, and snakes.<sup>66</sup> On the prior day, Shrove Tuesday, farm families used leftover lard from frying Fasnacht donuts to ritually anoint garden tools and plows to ensure an abundant agricultural year and to protect the soil in the kitchen garden and grain-fields from pests.<sup>67</sup> Later during Holy Week, wild dandelion greens were gathered and eaten on Maundy Thursday to impart the blessings of *Griener Dannerschdaag* (Green Thursday), which commemorated the Holy Supper, when bitter greens were eaten by Jesus and his disciples as part of the Jewish observation of Passover.<sup>68</sup>

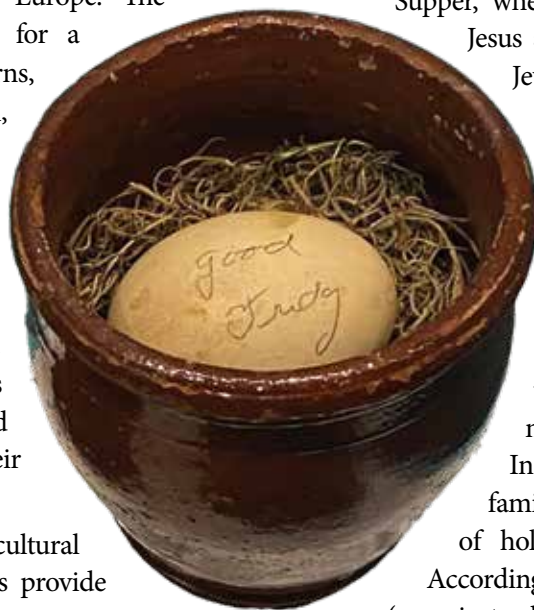
Eating greens on this day was believed to prevent lethargy and illness in early spring.<sup>69</sup>

Good Friday was the most auspicious of these Lenten days, when no work of any kind was to be done, with the exception of the utmost necessities in caring for livestock.

Instead, Pennsylvania Dutch families kept busy with a wide range of holiday observances and rituals.

According to folklore, it always rained (even just a little bit) on Good Friday,<sup>70</sup> and rural families collected such consecrated rainwater, and even dew, in jars to prevent illness and for the baptism of children in some rural union churches in Berks County.<sup>71</sup>

Most significantly, however, the Pennsylvania Dutch considered eggs laid on Good Friday to be intrinsically holy and were set aside to be eaten for breakfast on Easter morning to prevent illness.<sup>72</sup> On many local farms, families selected an egg consecrated



Good Friday egg (*Kaarfreidaagsoi*), Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, gift of Carl and Minerva Arner. Emma Koenig of New Ringgold, Schuylkill County, gathered this Good Friday egg in the late twentieth century, and each year she placed one in the barn, farm house, coops, and sheds on the farm to bless and protect the buildings and their occupants from storms, lightning, and fire.



by virtue of this special day, and hid it in a container in the attic of the farmhouse to protect the house from storms, lightning, fire, and illness. One contact from Schuylkill County recalled that an egg was placed in each building on the farm, including the house, barn, sheds, coops, and other outbuildings.<sup>73</sup> A good Friday egg could also be employed to relieve a hernia or to reduce a fever, and several contacts from the border of Berks and Lehigh counties not only recalled this practice but saved the delicate Good Friday eggs for decades in observation of this annual practice.<sup>74</sup>

While most Good Friday eggs were kept perfectly white and fresh, with occasional inscriptions for the year they were collected, on rare occasions, some were also hard boiled and dyed red, along with ordinary Easter eggs prepared on Holy Saturday for the celebration the following day. Among the Pennsylvania Dutch, Easter eggs generally fell into two main categories: those that were intended for eating and those featuring a wide range of decorative motifs that were presented as gifts. Both classes of Easter eggs were typically hard boiled in natural dyes.

Like their ancestors in Europe, the Pennsylvania Dutch boiled their Easter eggs with the skins of yellow onions. A small amount of vinegar was used to bind the dye to the calcium of the shell. Depending on the concentration of the dye, onion skins produce a limited range of warm colors from orange to deep red or brown. These colors also varied depending upon the breed of chickens, and whether the hens laid white, brown, or pale blue eggs. Like many other European cultures,

the Pennsylvania Dutch considered the traditional red resulting from onion skins to be significant for Easter eggs because of the color's association with the blood of Jesus shed at his Crucifixion on Good Friday.

Other colors were also historically produced from black walnut hulls, coffee or oak bark for shades of deep brown to black, and hickory bark or elder catkins for yellow.<sup>75</sup> Shredded red cabbage or dried hibiscus flowers, which if boiled and allowed to oxidize, formed a deep emerald green, while dried elderberries, currants, or pokeberries could be reconstituted for shades of magenta, and roots such as turmeric or beets produced yellow and pink.

If natural dye plants were shredded and kept in the dye bath at the time of boiling the eggs, this produced mottled colors, especially onion skins, which created a variegated appearance if left in close contact with the eggs. A uniform color could be achieved with dye plants that were boiled and strained to remove them from the dye bath. The Pennsylvania Dutch dyed not only chicken eggs with these methods, but also goose, duck, turkey, guinea and peahen eggs.

Families saved any eggs that cracked in the boiling process for eating, while those considered suitable for decoration were carefully selected to ensure their quality. Rich colors, especially deep reds, greens and browns, were favored for traditional scratching techniques that produced high-contrast decorative forms. A pen knife or a pin with the head firmly pressed into a cork worked perfectly to remove portions of the dyed surface, revealing the white of the shell underneath.

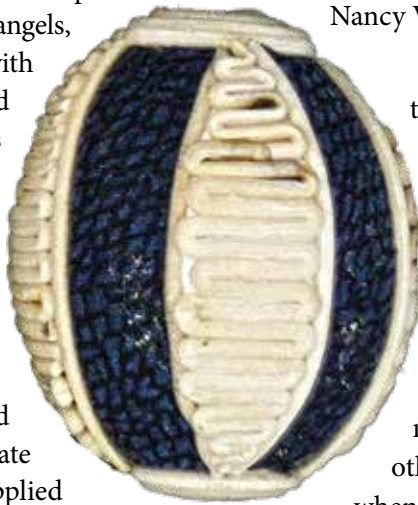


A traditional Pennsylvania Dutch scratched Easter egg, Twentieth Century, Berks County. Private Collection of Elaine Vardjan. Scratching eggs is a living tradition among the Pennsylvania Dutch, and is also one of the earliest types of Easter egg decoration documented in America among the descendants of German-speaking immigrants to Pennsylvania. The contents of this egg were blown out, and a cord was attached to hang the egg.

The entire family—women, men, and children—participated in this delicate art form. Eggs presented as gifts for family and friends were typically inscribed with names, initials, dates, and artistic designs, and youths exchanged decorated eggs as tokens of affection. Such delicately inscribed Easter eggs were highly personalized and varied considerably from one individual to the next, and some of these eggs serve as heirlooms, recording the family history as a unique form of documentary material culture. Among historic examples in Pennsylvania, a wide range of both representational and abstract forms appear, and while birds, flowers, and star patterns are among the most numerous, other documented examples include images of animals, people, angels, and religious iconography, along with houses, agricultural implements, and even grandfather clocks—images connecting families to their lived experiences in the world.<sup>76</sup>

### APPLIED EASTER EGG DECORATIONS

In addition to egg scratching, the Pennsylvania Dutch employed several other techniques to decorate Easter eggs, including the use of applied patterned fabrics or the pith of the common bulrush known as *Binsegraas*, which can be carefully removed and adhered to the surface. There are two basic techniques for applying strands of rush pith. Either the egg features fabric cutouts that are tightly framed in spirals of pith, or the pith wraps the entire egg in tight spirals and applied fabric cutouts embellish the surface. Although both forms were once commonplace in Pennsylvania, the latter technique was once favored in the twentieth century by the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County.<sup>77</sup>

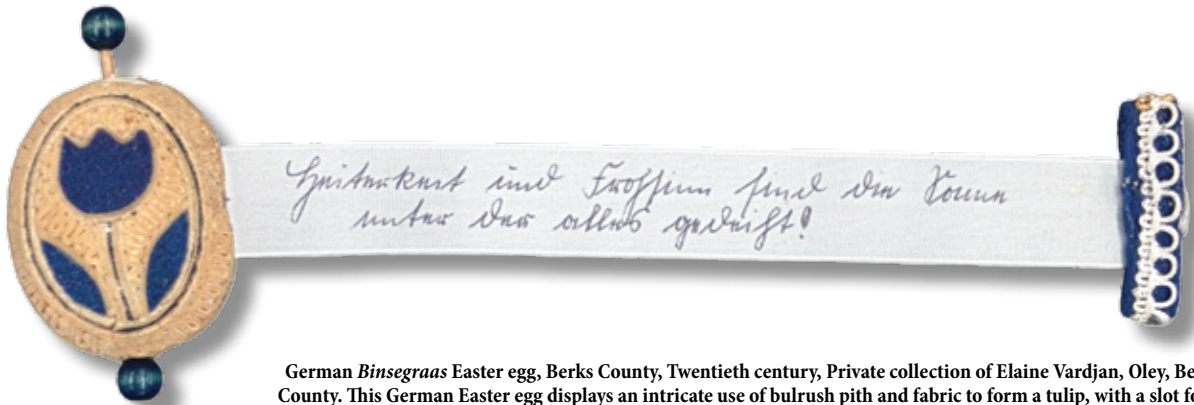


The use of *Binsegraas* in Pennsylvania has all but vanished. The technique relies upon a ready supply of bulrushes harvested from wet meadows, and according to local lore, the best bulrushes are to be found where cows fertilize them with their manure.<sup>78</sup> The rushes then have to dry, and the pith is painstakingly removed by forcing a wooden match stick along the rush while simultaneously splitting the outer cylindrical husk of the grass. Long strands of pith are best to work with, but require patience and skill to properly remove it. Two of the foremost artists continuing this practice in Pennsylvania are Elaine (Becker) Vardjan and her daughter-in-law Nancy Vardjan of Oley, Berks County.

The use of rush pith is a tradition that is found on both sides of the Atlantic, especially in German-speaking communities, where the practice is accompanied by folk beliefs that the phase of the moon affects the quality of the pith. According to German sources, the rushes must be picked at full moon when the pith is at its prime, otherwise, the reeds will be empty when the moon wanes.<sup>79</sup> The practice has been documented in Göttingen and other parts of Germany,<sup>80</sup> as well as Poland, where in Silesia, they combine the pith with strands of wool.<sup>81</sup> One German variety of the pith-covered egg includes an inscribed ribbon that unrolls like a scroll from a rod inserted into holes at the top and bottom of the egg, and emerges from a slot on one side. The messages tend to be sentimental or inspirational, in keeping with the egg's role as both a token of affection and a sacred object.

*Binsegraas* Easter egg, Berks County, by Viola E. Miller (1916-1982), ca. 1960, private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. A traditional form of appliqué Easter egg decoration in Pennsylvania involves carefully removing long strands of the inner pith of bulrushes and applying it to the egg's surface, along with fabric accents applied below the pith, or as surface elements on top of the pith.





German *Binsegraas* Easter egg, Berks County, Twentieth century, Private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. This German Easter egg displays an intricate use of bulrush pith and fabric to form a tulip, with a slot for a concealed scroll to extend out from a spool in the egg that provides the German text: “*Heiterkeit und Frohsinn sind die Sonne unter der alles gedeiht!*” (Merriment and gaiety are the sun under which all things thrive!).

Redware Easter eggs and charger, Lester Breining, Berks County, 1979–2006, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, and private collections of Elaine Vardjan and Ruth Laubenstein Yablonski. Lester Breining (1935–2011) was the leading Pennsylvania Dutch redware potter of the twentieth century. He opened a pottery workshop in Robesonia, Berks County, in 1965. With roots tracing back to German-speaking settlers who arrived in Berks County in 1712, Lester, a ninth-generation descendant, aimed to bring back early techniques, materials, and styles in both practical and decorative items. Each year, he made redware Easter eggs with bright yellow slip and carved patterns that revealed the red clay beneath. This technique, called *sgrafito*, parallels the colorful scratched eggs in the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition.



## HISTORIC PENNSYLVANIA EASTER EGGS

Although it is likely that thousands of Easter eggs have been decorated each year in Pennsylvania throughout the past three centuries, seldom do these fragile decorated eggs survive from one generation to the next.

Part of the reason for this is that previous generations decorated hard boiled eggs that gradually dried out. Unlike today's practices of hollowing out the egg shells by blowing out the yolk and white, the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition involved leaving the egg entirely intact. The white would gradually dry out, and the yolk would become solid and rattle inside the shell. Normally such eggs would dry completely in a few years, with minimal, if any, odor. The only exception to this, is if any imperfections compromised the shell, such as accidental weak spots from scratching or using too much vinegar in the dye when hard boiling, which would cause the egg to leak and putrefy. Eggs had to be kept in a stable, dry environment, such as a cupboard, a small box, or on the mantle, where they would be preserved.

Typically only the most decorative of eggs would be saved from year to year, as a common Pennsylvania Dutch-language proverb ominously states: "*Friehyaahr iss net do, bis die Oschderoier*



*gesse sinn*" (Spring is not here until the Easter eggs are all eaten).<sup>82</sup> Although spoken in jest, this proverb accurately represents the gusto which once marked the festivities of Easter day, when children and youths not only exchanged eggs, but commenced competitive activities to gather and eat as many eggs as possible. These traditions include annual egg eating contests or a competitive game called "egg picking," in which two eggs were struck against one another and the egg that survived the encounter was determined the winner.<sup>83</sup> Competitive

children selected eggs for their shape and hardness of shell in the hopes of qualifying as the local champion. Those that won such contests got to keep the eggs of their opponents. Combined with annual egg-eating contests, it is small wonder that so few Easter eggs survived from previous centuries. The *Juniata Sentinel & Republican* newspaper reported on April 22, 1874 that a "champion egg-eater lives in Ephrata...last Easter he ate 40 and still lives."<sup>84</sup>

Although these games usually included only the simplest dyed hard boiled eggs, still the overwhelming majority of the Easter eggs produced in Pennsylvania throughout the centuries were broken and didn't survive. Early Easter eggs preserved by families, private collectors, and cultural

A Traditional Pennsylvania Dutch Pin-Scratched Duck Egg, Pennsylvania, nineteenth century, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. This pin-scratched duck egg features the images of a delicately articulated bird. The shell was dyed red-brown with the traditional onion skin vinegar dye. This egg is one of two preserved by collector Joseph Kindig Jr. of York, Pennsylvania.





Scratched Pennsylvania Dutch Easter egg, Strodes Mills, Mifflin County, 1844, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. In 1844, George and Susanna Strunk of Strodes Mill, Mifflin County, crafted a traditional scratched Easter egg for their two-year-old son, A. James Strunk (1841–1871). Using onion skins, they dyed the egg a russet red color and decorated it with flowers, stars, an owl, a turtle, a bird, the initials “A. J. S.,” and the date. The egg has been passed down by members of the family for generations, a rare survival from that time due to the fragility of natural eggs.

institutions are a rarity. Some of these are from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while very few examples from the eighteenth century still exist. The ephemeral nature of the tradition was the subject of much attention in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspapers throughout Southeastern and Central Pennsylvania, where editors queried their readers to find stories of the oldest Easter eggs in Pennsylvania communities.

An excellent example of a traditional scratched egg surviving from 1844 was made by George and Susanna Strunk of Strodes Mills, Mifflin County, for their son A. James Strunk (1841-1871), when he was just two years old. They dyed the egg with onion skins for a russet red color, and adorned it with flowers, stars, an owl, a turtle, a bird, and the initials “A. J. S.” and the date. The egg was passed down by members of the family for generations and was eventually featured in several newspaper articles in Mifflin County as one of the oldest surviving eggs in the region. A newspaper clipping preserved by the family, dated April 17, 1963, shows Mrs. Margaret

M. Strunk holding the egg that had belonged to her grandfather A. James Strunk. Another clipping from 1960 indicates that Mrs. Strunk had displayed the egg, then 116 years old, in her office at the Lewistown Insurance & Realty Company, which drew attention from the public and the local press.<sup>85</sup>

While the Strunk egg is one of only a few eggs that survived from the mid-nineteenth century, eggs from the eighteenth century are exceptionally rare in Pennsylvania Communities. The Lancaster Daily Express on March 27, 1875, reported the survival of an Easter egg scratched 100 years prior, when Easter was celebrated just three days before the Battles of Lexington and Concord at the start of the Revolutionary War in 1775.<sup>86</sup>

In 1960, Dr. Alfred Shoemaker of the Pennsylvania Folklife Society located an article published in 1884 in *Mount Joy Herald* including an account of yet an older egg. Jacob N. Brubaker (1832–1913), bishop of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and member of the Landisville

Mennonite congregation, described an egg formerly owned by Mara Brubaker, bearing the initials “M. B.” and the year “1774.”<sup>87</sup>

This description matches an egg that survives today as part of the collection of the Pennsylvania Folklife Society, now at the Berman Museum, Ursinus College. It is likely that Shoemaker’s discovery in the *Herald* was connected in some way with his obtaining the egg for the Society. Interestingly, recent photographs of the object suggest that this artifact appears to have been created using a resist dye technique, rather than scratching, which is an unexplainable anomaly in Pennsylvania Dutch Easter egg traditions. Evidence for this lies in the uniformity of smooth wide lines and round dots in the creation of floral designs, a central crown motif, and the initials in two hearts, surrounded by dots – all of which were likely produced by applying wax with a tool.<sup>88</sup>

Although Brubaker vouched for the provenance of the egg as being connected with a family member in the Lancaster County Mennonite community, the wax resist technique appears more consistent with European techniques than those of early Pennsylvania. Alfred Shoemaker warns later in *Easter tide in Pennsylvania* that he questions the Pennsylvania provenance

attached to “a considerable amount of folk art today in museums and private collections dubbed as Pennsylvania Dutch,”<sup>89</sup> citing a Swiss imported egg as evidence of transatlantic exchange of material culture in the twentieth century by travelers and collectors.<sup>90</sup>

Shoemaker also cites what he describes as the earliest known reference to a scratched egg “in the Dutch Country” from Thomas Anburey’s *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, published in London in 1798. However, Anburey’s description of scratched eggs was not from Pennsylvania as Shoemaker reported, but rather in Frederick, Maryland, where a sizeable population of Pennsylvania Dutch families had relocated from Lancaster, York, and other counties adjacent to the Mason-Dixon line dividing the two states. In a letter from “Colonel Beattie”[sic] Plantation, near Frederick Town, in Maryland, July 11, 1781,” Anburey explains:

“At Easter holidays the young people have a custom, in this province, of boiling eggs in logwood, which dyes the shell crimson, and though this colour will not rub off, you may, with a pin, scratch on them any figure or device you think proper. This is practised by the young men and maidens, who present them to each other as love tokens. As these eggs are boiled a considerable time to take the dye, the



Two scratched Easter eggs by Peter V. Fritsch, 2007 & 2002. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, Gift of Peter V. Fritsch. These elaborate Easter eggs were produced as gifts for Peter Fritsch's mother, to whom he presented an egg every year as a token of his appreciation and affection. Many of Fritsch's close relatives and friends received eggs each year, carefully inscribed in a variety of scratched and painted techniques.

shell acquires great strength, and the little children divert themselves by striking the eggs against each other, and that which breaks becomes the property of him whose egg remains whole.

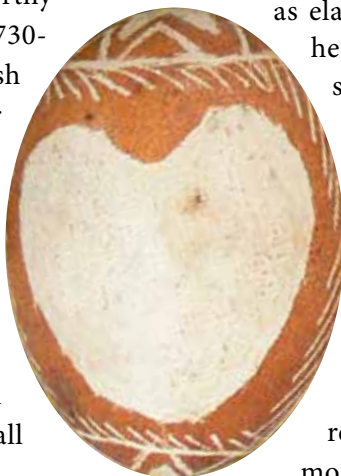
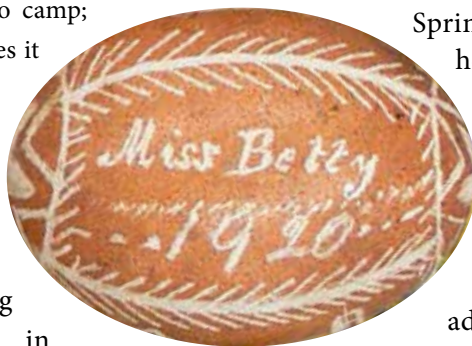
To impress the minds of his children with their glorious struggle for independence, as they term it, the Colonel [Beattie] has an egg, on which is engraved the battle of Bunker's Hill. This he takes infinite pains to explain to his children, but will not suffer them to touch it, being the performance of his son gone to camp; but now being slain, he preserves it as a relic.<sup>91</sup>

Anburey's personal account provides an interesting overview of the tradition of scratched eggs, although he does not mention the strong German cultural influence in Frederick, Maryland. It is noteworthy that Colonel Charles Beatty (1730-1804) whose paternal line was Irish and originally hailed from Ulster County, New York,<sup>92</sup> showed such enthusiasm for the local tradition. But Anburey makes no mention of the tradition's origin within any particular ethnic enclave, suggesting that the tradition had already become a shared regional tradition by this time—one that all Americans could enjoy.

## TOKENS OF AFFECTION, FRIENDSHIP, AND DEVOTION

Most notable in Anburey's letter is the description of the eggs as "love tokens." Among the historic eggs to survive to the present day, very few show obvious indications of having been tokens of affection, although it is clear that the practice was common. Shoemaker documented one example from 1888, bearing nothing more than a heart, the year, and the name "Lizzy Cammauf."<sup>93</sup> This was likely Lizzy E. (Peiffer) Cammauf (1870-1935), of Sinking Spring, Berks County. The egg bears her married name when she was 18 years old, suggesting that the egg may have been the work of her husband, George F. Cammauf (1867-1942).<sup>94</sup> On another example from 1920, an anonymous admirer inscribed the name of his sweetheart "Miss Betty" as well as elaborate images of stars, a large white heart, and an anchor. Thoughtfully, the symbols appear to suggest devotion and steadfastness, and the golden brown color of the shell was likely produced with onion skins or black walnut shells.<sup>95</sup>

This tradition of giving eggs to loved ones, friends, and family continues to this day in the Pennsylvania Dutch cultural region. In Berks County, one of the most prolific makers of scratched eggs



Scratched Easter egg as a token of affection, Pennsylvania, 1920. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. In 1920, an anonymous admirer in Pennsylvania scratched this Easter egg as a token of affection for "Miss Betty." The egg features images of stars, a large white heart, and an anchor, symbolizing devotion and steadfastness. The golden-brown color likely resulted from using onion skins or black walnut shells as dye materials.





Pennsylvania Dutch Easter eggs by Peter V. Fritsch, Longswamp, Berks County, ca. 1975–2010, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, Gift of Peter V. Fritsch. The prolific Pennsylvania Dutch artist and poet Peter V. Fritsch (1945–2015) created these Easter eggs as part of his annual tradition of handcrafting tokens of appreciation for his friends and family. Rooted in both traditional and contemporary artistic expressions, Fritsch's work evokes the connection of local culture with the land and the cycles of the seasons. His work features depictions of birds, plants, and creatures of the earth, along with geometric motifs inspired by stars and religious symbols. Using a variety of scratched and painted techniques, Fritsch's work embodied both the continuity and evolution of Pennsylvania Dutch Easter egg traditions.

in the late twentieth century was Peter V. Fritsch (1945-2015) of Longswamp Township, Berks County. A Pennsylvania Dutch-language poet, artist, musician, playwright, and an art teacher in Reading public schools, Fritsch produced dozens of exquisitely scratched and painted eggs each year and presented them as gifts to his friends and family. While living on an ancestral farm along South Mountain in Longswamp, Fritsch raised his own chickens, ducks, geese, and peacocks, and

even ventured to local ponds and lakes to bravely gather eggs from the nests of Canada geese, armed with nothing more than a household broom and an oak splint basket.<sup>96</sup>

Rooted in traditional and contemporary artistic expressions, Fritsch's work evoked the connection of local culture to the land and the progression of the seasons, with special attention paid to the birds, plants and creatures of the earth, along with geometric motifs of the stars and

religious symbols. Using a variety of scratched and painted techniques, Fritsch's work embodies both the continuity and evolution of Pennsylvania Dutch Easter egg traditions.

One of Fritsch's most cherished motifs was the "bird tree"—a variation of the Pennsylvania Dutch Tree of Life, and a central folk-cultural religious symbol of life and rebirth among the Pennsylvania Dutch. One particularly elaborate example of Fritsch's work preserved in the collection of the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, depicts the Tree of Life positively teeming with colorful songbirds, accompanied by an original Pennsylvania Dutch-language poem on the reverse: "*Kinner nau sehn die Vogel im Bahm. Im Friehyaahr sie singe paar bei paar, Aasech Gottes schaffes in Auge un Ohr* (Children, now see the birds in the trees. Their singing in springtime is a sign of God's work to the eye and ear).

Although the Pennsylvania Dutch folk art depiction of the Tree of Life is frequently misconstrued as an expression of commercialized kitsch or part of a polite, secular form of decoration, this couldn't be further from the truth. Like many of the classic religious motifs featuring images of the natural world and celestial bodies, the Tree of Life is not only biblical, but also emblematic of the tendency in Protestant devotional art to celebrate the natural world as an expression of the sacred.

Bird tree Easter egg, Peter V. Fritsch, Longswamp, Berks County, 2002. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. The Tree of Life, teeming with birds, is an important religious symbol of life and rebirth for the Pennsylvania Dutch. This egg by Peter V. Fritsch features an original Pennsylvania Dutch poem on the reverse side.



Among early works of art of the Pennsylvania Dutch, the Tree of Life appears especially in illuminated religious documents, including birth and baptismal certificates, religious verses used for copy exercises in early schools, and inscribed bookplates in prayerbooks presented to youth at confirmation. One particularly colorful manuscript certificate, featuring vibrant images of the Tree of Life, commemorates the baptism of Moses Dunckel, born just two weeks after Easter on April 14, 1813, to Jacob and Louis (Krebs) Dunckel of Walker Township, Centre County. Produced by an anonymous scrivener and artist in that region known for producing arrangements of birds, the certificate bears characteristic symmetrical arrangements of stylized branches and birds. These Tree of Life motifs feature the form of a horn—a symbol of annunciation—as the trunk.

Such certificates were commonly produced for Pennsylvania Dutch families by manuscript artists and calligraphers, who were often schoolteachers in their communities, and these material texts are commonly known today as Fraktur, after the German-language term for the elaborate blackletter calligraphy (*Frakturschrift*).<sup>97</sup> Occasionally, these were the very same artists who decorated Easter eggs,<sup>98</sup> and in one such case, a Pennsylvania Dutch scrivener produced the earliest known images of the Easter rabbit in North America.<sup>99</sup>





Above: Tree of Life, birth and baptismal certificate, Walker Township, Centre County, 1813, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. This colorful manuscript certificate features the Tree of Life. In the devotional traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch, this symbol reflects their religious appreciation for the natural world. The Tree of Life motifs have stylized branches and birds arranged symmetrically around the form of a horn—a symbol of annunciation—as the trunk. The central inscription records the baptism of Moses Dunckel, son of Jacob and Louis (Krebs) Dunckel, on April 14, 1813. Manuscript artists, who were often community schoolteachers, regularly created these certificates for Pennsylvania Dutch families.



Left: Tree of Life, Johnny Claypoole, Lenhartsville, Berks County, 1977, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. While the folk-art portrayal of the Pennsylvania Dutch Tree of Life is sometimes dismissed as kitsch or merely a polite, secular form of decoration, this interpretation is misleading. Similar to other classic motifs that incorporate depictions of the natural world and celestial bodies, the Tree of Life not only holds biblical significance but also exemplifies a tendency in Protestant devotional art traditions to celebrate the natural world as an expression of the sacred.





Left: Easter rabbit, after Conrad Gilbert, ca. 1810, theorem painting on velvet by Sandra Jean Coldren, private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. Schuylkill County schoolmaster Conrad Gilbert's Easter rabbit images, the earliest in America, continue to inspire artists in Pennsylvania to embrace the roots of this custom. Here Sandra Jean Coldren faithfully recreates Gilbert's original paintings, depicting the Easter hare with a basket of colored eggs. Two of Gilbert's paintings survive, which he made as rewards of merit for his students when he taught in a one-room school in present-day Orwigsburg, Schuylkill County.

Below: Conrad Gilbert house blessing, Tulpehocken, Berks County, 1784, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University Johann Conrad Gilbert (1743–1812) penned this hand-written house blessing titled “A Beautiful Christian House Blessing for All Pious House Fathers and House Mothers” (*Ein schöner Christlicher Hauß seggen, für alle fromme Hauß väter und Hauß mütter*). It was created for the family of Adam Schmidt of Tulpehocken Township, Berks County. The blessing provides comforting words of advice for Pennsylvania Dutch households, meant to be displayed and read aloud during special occasions, such as Easter Day, and in times of trouble.

## THE EASTER RABBIT

Sometime between 1795 and 1810, school master, church warden, and calligrapher Johann Conrad Gilbert (1734–1812) of Brunswick Township, Schuylkill County,<sup>100</sup> produced a series of carefully drawn and painted images of the Easter rabbit as *Belohnungen* or rewards of merit for his school students.<sup>101</sup> As a first generation emigrant from Germany, Gilbert's depiction of the Easter rabbit, characterized with a wild posture, bristling ears, and unfurled tongue, reflects the original meaning of the German term *Osterhase* as “Easter hare.”<sup>102</sup> Gilbert's wild hare carries a low-slung basket replete with colored Easter eggs in red, yellow, green, and black, representing his legendary role as the conveyor of eggs to children on Easter morning. Thus, the very notion of the “Easter rabbit” is an American idiom, translated from the Pennsylvania Dutch vernacular term *Oschderhaas*, and predicated on the fact that the German-speaking immigrants found no hares



when they settled in Pennsylvania.<sup>103</sup> Two of Conrad Gilbert's Easter rabbit paintings managed to survive into the present day, and both are preserved in institutional collections at Colonial Williamsburg and Winterthur Museum.<sup>104</sup>

German-speaking immigrants like Conrad Gilbert, who arrived in Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, first introduced the Easter rabbit to North America. Although they emigrated from many different parts of what is today Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Alsace, France, the majority came from communities in the Southwest in an area formerly defined as the Kurpfalz, or the Electoral Palatinate where the tradition of the Easter rabbit was widely known.<sup>105</sup> This included the region that is now the Rhineland-Pfalz of today, as well as parts of present-day Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, and Alsace. Emigrants from territories farther south or east departed by means of the Rhine River that passed through the Palatinate, making the region a diverse cultural mixture throughout the time of emigration. Interestingly, there were once other

legendary animals that delivered Easter eggs in German-speaking lands, such as the Easter fox of Westphalia, the cuckoo of Styria, the Easter stork of Thuringia, as well as many others,<sup>106</sup> that never found their way to Pennsylvania.

According to the regional custom, early Pennsylvania Dutch families often prepared Easter baskets or nests for the arrival of the *Oschderhaas*, who, as children were told, would visit in the night to fill the baskets or nests with decorated eggs. Children were encouraged to create these nests outside in the open air, or on windows or on the floor in the home. They carefully considered the choice of soft nest materials, and locations accessible to the Easter rabbit. These nests were once commonly created each year by children of farm families, but due to their ephemeral nature, no original examples are known to survive.

The Easter rabbit was also believed to lay these colored eggs, and was credited with hiding hard boiled, dyed eggs throughout the property for the children to gather in their baskets.



Easter rabbit watercolor illustration, Peter V. Fritsch, Longswamp, Berks County, 2009, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, gift of Peter V. Fritsch. In this watercolor painting, Peter V. Fritsch depicts a naturalistic Easter rabbit carrying eggs in a woven basket to children on Easter morning. The title in Pennsylvania Dutch reads: "Der Oschder Haas kummt mit die Oier!" (The Easter rabbit comes bearing the eggs!). Fritsch was also a bringer of eggs, creating elaborately decorated chicken, goose, and peacock eggs each year for friends and family.



Another surprising (and biologically puzzling) aspect of the legend, is that many Pennsylvania Dutch people refer to the egg-laying Easter rabbit as “he”—the result of generations of use of the masculine pronoun *der* accompanying the vernacular word *Haas*.<sup>107</sup> Although the pronoun applied to the whole species and not any one particular individual rabbit, the result is that even today throughout the United States, many communities interpret the Easter rabbit as male—further evidence of the tradition’s origin.

The legend of the Easter rabbit was completely unknown to the English, Scotch-Irish, and Welsh immigrants in the Commonwealth, as well as the other communities of Anglo-Americans who settled throughout the United States. Nevertheless, the tradition soon spread and was widely embraced by diverse communities by the second half of the nineteenth century. Today, the Easter rabbit has become one of the

most cherished of American holiday traditions.

In 1882, prolific writer, educator, and Quaker Phoebe Earle Gibbons (1821-1893) of Lancaster, described the rural practices of children in Southeastern Pennsylvania:

“If the children have no garden, they make nests in the woodshed, barn, or house. They gather colored flowers for the rabbit to eat, that it may lay colored eggs. If there be a garden, the eggs are hidden singly in the green grass, box-wood, or elsewhere. On Easter Sunday morning they whistle for the rabbit, and the children imagine that they see him jump the fence. After church, on Easter Sunday morning, they hunt the eggs, and in the afternoon the boys go out in the meadows and crack eggs or play with them like marbles. Or sometimes children are invited to a neighbor’s to hunt eggs.”<sup>108</sup>

Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker emphatically described the Easter rabbit as “perhaps the greatest contribution the Pennsylvania Dutch have made to American life.”<sup>109</sup>

Not one to favor over-use of the superlative, Shoemaker’s reasoning



Hand-built straw Easter nest, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. A parallel to the Easter basket tradition is the creation of Easter nests by children who expected overnight visits from the Easter rabbit. These nests were made outdoors, on windows, or on the floor in the home. Children thoughtfully chose soft nest materials and accessible locations for the Easter rabbit. Once a common practice among children in farm communities, the temporary nature of these nests has resulted in the absence of surviving examples.

Pennsylvania Dutch traditional Easter basket, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Pennsylvania Dutch families were the first Americans to create Easter baskets. Children decorated household baskets and lined them with straw or dried meadow grass. This split-oak gathering basket, complete with a sturdy handle, was ideal for Easter egg hunts.



was simple—no other aspect of Pennsylvania Dutch culture achieved such broad acceptance in communities throughout the United States. However, Shoemaker also concedes that the tradition was certainly reinforced by later waves of nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants to the United States, as well as the mass production of Easter trade cards imported directly from Germany.

Over four million German immigrants arrived between 1850 and 1900, and populated cities in the Northeast and Midwestern United States,<sup>110</sup> such as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Chicago. These new groups of German-Americans were culturally distinct from the earlier communities of the Pennsylvania Dutch, who were predominantly rural, and increasingly relied on English as their educational language, while Pennsylvania Dutch vernacular remained their oral, home language. Both groups, however, contributed to perpetuating the Easter rabbit as an American tradition.

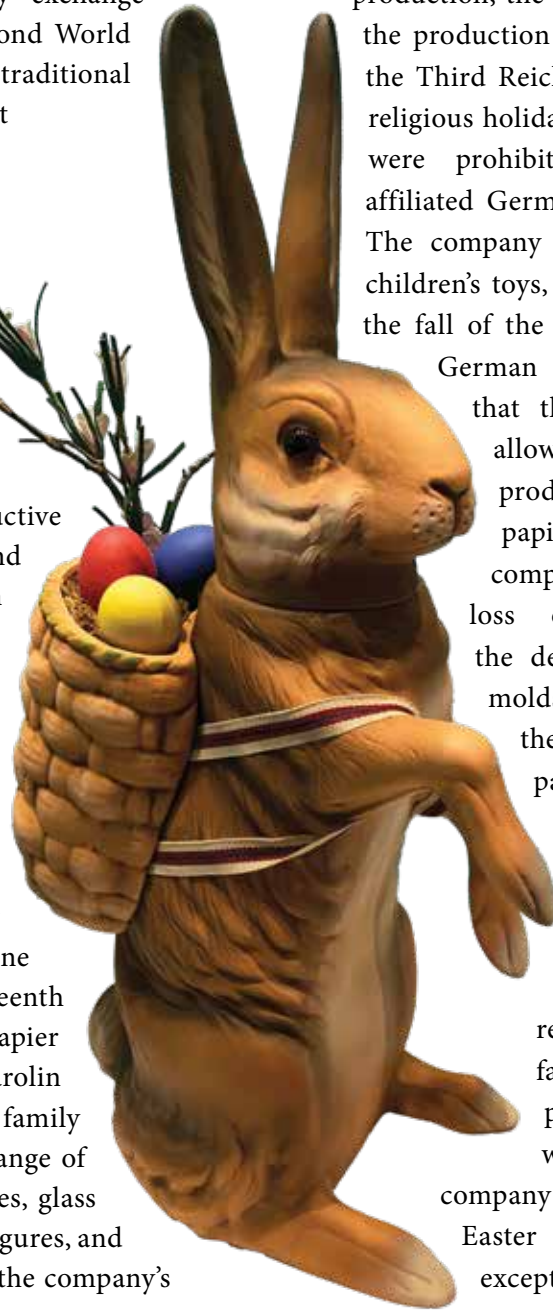
## GERMAN OSTEROIER



With the rise of industrial printing in the second half of the nineteenth century, lithographic Easter ephemera was mass produced on a commercial scale in Germany, and to a lesser extent in the United States. Die-cut and embossed lithograph prints were issued as trade cards and formed into papier mâché egg-shaped candy holders presented to children at Easter. These lithographic artistic works often featured scenes of the Easter rabbit or groups of rabbits hiding and delivering eggs, or images of the natural world at springtime, complete with floral bouquets, nests of eggs, and baby ducks and chicks, often accompanied by highly sentimentalized portrayals of children with a distinctly Victorian style. Although the First World War later stopped the import of these candy holders to the United States, production continued after the war, replacing the imagery of the Victorian era with cartoon depictions of Easter that only served to increase the popularity of the candy holders well into the twentieth century.

Egg-shaped Easter rabbit candy holders, Germany, ca. 1900, private collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal. These candy holders feature classic images of the Easter rabbit in his traditional role as the bringer of eggs amidst symbols of spring such as pussy willows and hatching chicks. The candy holders were mass produced in Germany and imported to the United States. These candy holders were first printed as flat, full-color lithographs that were carefully sliced and adhered in strips to the convex surface of pressed paper egg-forms. Although chocolate was also a major export from Germany, these candy holders typically were filled by confectioners in urban areas of the United States who sold them directly to customers. The candy holders were not only containers for Easter candy, but they also served as decorations that could be reused year after year. The simplest way to display them is to suspend them from a loop of string inserted between the two halves of the egg.

This transatlantic holiday exchange halted by the time of the Second World War, and international trade in traditional holiday decorations all but collapsed. Christian traditions also faltered under pressure from the Nazi regime, and again later when East Germany was divided and under Soviet control. Although German companies were among the most productive purveyors of Christian and secular holiday decorations in the world, many were forced to repurpose their businesses under communist leadership. One such company, Marolin Manufaktur of Steinach, had been established in 1900 by Richard Mahr (1876-1952), who specialized in producing religious figures in the Nazarene style popular in the late nineteenth century from finely cast papier mâché. By the 1920s, Marolin had expanded beyond a family company to include a wider range of production, including Nativities, glass Christmas ornaments, Easter figures, and candy holders. At the peak of the company's



production, the Second World War halted the production of nativity figures under the Third Reich, and following the war, religious holiday figures and decorations were prohibited under the Soviet-affiliated German Democratic Republic. The company continued to make cast children's toys, but it was not until after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990 that the company was finally allowed to once again resume production of traditional cast papier mâché figures. But the company suffered tremendous loss of infrastructure with the destruction of its original molds and equipment. Even the original recipe for the papier mâché was forgotten until a barely legible transcription of the recipe written in chalk on the back of a cellar door was unexpectedly re-discovered, allowing the family company to resume production of traditional wares. Today the Marolin company continues to produce cast Easter rabbit candy holders of exceptional quality.<sup>111</sup>

German papier mâché Easter rabbit candy holder, Marolin Manufaktur, Steinach, Germany, private collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal, Bryn Athyn, Montgomery County. This papier mâché candy holder was made by the German company Marolin, established in 1900. Marolin is known for producing finely cast Nativity figures, holiday decorations, and toys. The company specializes in hollow candy holders, including traditional Easter rabbit forms. The company's unique papier mâché formula was nearly lost after World War II when the GDR in East Germany banned the promotion of religious figures. However, during German reunification in 1990, the family company resumed private operations. The original recipe, barely legible, was unexpectedly rediscovered on the back of a cellar door, allowing Marolin to resume its tradition.





Left: Two Victorian candy holders, Germany, ca. 1900, private collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal. These classic Victorian illustrations show a child gathering Easter eggs from the Easter rabbit, accompanied by images of rabbits and chicks. Employing mass production methods, the images were printed and applied to pressed paper candy holders. After cutting the lithograph prints into strips, they were carefully adhered to the round surface of the egg. This technique preceded the use of steam-operated presses that shaped printed images into convex egg forms for the two halves of the candy holders. Typically filled with chocolate, these holders were subsequently exported to the United States.



Above: Postcard of Easter rabbit delivering eggs with a cannon, Germany, ca. 1910, private collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal. This German postcard shows a uniformed Easter rabbit with chickens, blasting Easter eggs from a cannon toward a rural town in the distance. This humorous take on the Easter rabbit legend was printed in full-color lithography with metallic leaf and embossed, giving it a three-dimensional effect. Clever and inventive Easter greetings like these, printed in Germany, were widely popular in the United States before the First World War.

Above Left: Greeting card with Easter rabbit posing for the camera, Germany, ca. 1910, private collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal. This tongue-in-cheek greeting card features an Easter rabbit posing for the camera. It belongs to a genre of humorous Easter lithographs mass produced in Germany and distributed in Europe and the United States. The English caption "Easter Greetings" confirms that this card was intended to delight American audiences with its imaginative subject.



Easter greeting card, S. Hildesheimer & Co., private collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. During the late nineteenth century, Victorian greeting cards featuring Eastertide holiday imagery became widespread in the United States and Europe. Advances in full-color lithographic printing enabled mass production, like this eight-page lace-bordered card by British publisher Siegmund Hildesheimer (1832–1896) of London and Manchester. Born in Halberstadt, Germany, Hildesheimer's works reached the English-speaking world and were popular among Pennsylvania Dutch families. This card was displayed in the home of Alexander and Susan Printz of Reading, Pennsylvania, and later in the home of their daughter, Laura May (Printz) Green of Lebanon.

Although German Easter egg traditions were among the first to be brought to Pennsylvania, the traditions also evolved considerably over the centuries following mass immigration to North America, and Germans embraced a wide range of styles and forms, including scratched and painted eggs; rush pith, rye-straw, and fabric appliqué, as well as wax-resist dye methods and acid etching, both of the latter creating exceptionally fine line work.<sup>112</sup> These artistic eggs are still customarily given as gifts and tokens of affection, and the traditions have continued to grow and evolve on both sides of the Atlantic.

One of the leading producers of Easter eggs in Europe is the Peter T. Priess Company of Vienna, Austria, which employs 100 artists in nearby Salzburg to produce a line of painted Easter eggs. The company was established in 1975 by Peter and Dorota Priess, specializing in traditional glass Christmas ornaments and Easter eggs made from the shells of chicken, turkey, goose, and ostrich eggs that have been carefully blown out and outfitted with ribbons for hanging. They specialize in a wide variety of traditional painted drop-and-pull geometric designs, as well as images of







Easter rabbits, chicks, and other springtime themes. The company provides the yolks and whites of the eggs to bakeries as a sustainable partnership.<sup>113</sup> The Priess company is a leading exporter of eggs to other parts of the world, and because their eggs are meant to be hung, they have greatly facilitated the continued tradition of the *Osterbaum* (Easter tree) in Germany.

### THE OSTERBAUM AND THE EGG TREE

The Easter tree is typically decorated with eggs that have been pierced, blown out, and hung with ribbons, and the trees have two traditional forms. The first is a branch that is brought indoors to be displayed in a vase, while others prefer living trees outdoors that can easily be seen and appreciated by the community.<sup>114</sup> Typically these trees are apple trees or other fruit trees with dense branches that are usually bare save for a few buds or blossoms, depending on the timing of Easter each year. The tradition appears to date to the nineteenth century, but has become increasingly popular in parts of Germany, where egg trees were not only popular at Easter, but also at other times of the year, such as Lataera Sunday (21 days before Easter)<sup>115</sup> as well as New Years in some areas,<sup>116</sup> creating some confusion about the true origin of the custom.



The most popular Easter tree in Europe is the tree of Volker and Christina Kraft in Saalfeld, Thuringia, Germany, where the family hangs over 10,000 eggs each year. The operation grew to such proportions that it has now become an annual function located by the town's historic gate.<sup>117</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the German tradition of the *Osterbaum*, or Easter tree, was introduced to Pennsylvania, likely at the same time that many aspects of German Easter traditions were introduced through mass-produced lithographic greeting cards. Pennsylvanians embraced the concept of the egg tree, primarily in urban communities, where they were documented in local newspapers as a novelty prior to 1900. Prior to that time, the Pennsylvania Dutch rural tradition of decorating the bare branches of bushes with eggs at Easter was once a rarity in the Dutch Country.<sup>118</sup> In 1950, Pennsylvania graphic artist and children's author Katherine Milhous published *The Egg Tree*, which celebrated and disseminated the tradition throughout America.<sup>119</sup> The most popular version in Pennsylvania is the "Cotton Tree," which features the cotton-wrapped branches of a bare sapling, typically walnut or sassafras.

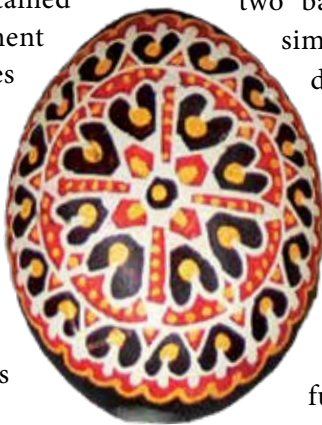
Left: Cotton-wrapped walnut tree, featuring eggs by Peter Priess Company of Vienna and Salzburg, ca. 2000, and sawdust dolls of rabbits and chicks by Debbie Jarret. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University & Private Collection of Ed and Kirsten Gyllenhaal.

Above: Austrian wooden eggs, painted with floral, silhouette, and peacock feather patterns, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center.

## EASTERN EUROPEAN TRADITIONS IN PENNSYLVANIA

As Pennsylvania transformed into an industrial power through coal, steel, and railroads in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emigrants from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world settled in the Coal Regions of the northeastern part of the state and other industrial centers such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, bringing with them their colorful and robust Easter traditions. These industrial communities have maintained their strong Eastern European element even today and include families with Ukrainian, Slovakian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, and Lithuanian roots. This variegated tapestry of cultures continues to interweave Easter traditions, including decorated eggs, into their colorful community expressions, among both Eastern Orthodox Christians and Catholics.

Just as the folk culture of Central and Western Europe was flavored by generations of Roman Catholic influence, so too are the Easter traditions a central feature of the Eastern Orthodox communities both in Europe and Pennsylvania. The integration of the church liturgy and daily life fostered vibrant and spiritually charged Easter egg traditions, decorated in a variety of styles across many cultures.



Pennsylvania's Coal Region is home to many of these traditional forms of decorated eggs, including *pysanky* among the Ukrainians, Poles and other Slavic groups, and *margučiai* among the Lithuanians. These intricately decorated eggs were once central to the sacred, agricultural, and social spheres of life in Eastern Europe.

### UKRAINIAN PYSANKY TRADITIONS

Ukrainian Orthodox Easter eggs have two basic forms: *krashanky*, eggs that are simply hard boiled with onion skins to dye them red over Holy Week and eaten with the Easter meal, and *pysanky*, which were highly decorative and distributed as gifts, offerings, or blessings.<sup>120</sup> Ukrainian families typically began decorating eggs early in Lent to have an abundant supply for the many social and religious functions for which they were required.

Traditionally, eggs of both types were brought to church to be blessed alongside *paska* (Easter) bread and portions of each type of food from the Easter meal. *Pysanky* (plural of *pysanka*) comes from the Ukrainian verb *pysaty*, meaning “to write or inscribe,”<sup>121</sup> as detailed layers of wax patterns are applied to the surface of the eggshell with a stylus, called a *kistka* (plural *kistky*),<sup>122</sup> masking many layers of color from successive dips into a dye bath.

Traditional pysanky eggs, Schuylkill County, ca. 1970, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. The eight-pointed star, commonly called *ruzha*, was first associated with the veneration of the sun god Dazhboh in Ukrainian stories. Later it came to represent Christian ideas of new life and resurrection. *Ruzha* is the name for the mallow flower, but the design often depicts flowers in general, suggesting a connection between earthly and celestial geometry.



Traditional patterns range from distinctive geometric and floral designs to religious imagery and are known for their high-contrast multicolor compositions. Although today many *pysanky* eggs are regarded as works of culturally specific folk art, for generations the eggs have also held a formal liturgical function<sup>123</sup> and were part of a wide spectrum of living folk traditions of blessing and protection.

At the annual Easter Vigil church service, *pysanky* and *krashanky* eggs are an essential part of the *paska* (Easter) basket. The contents, representing portions of the Easter meal, include *paska* bread, as well as all of the foods that were forbidden during the Lenten fast, such as ham, kielbasa sausage, butter, and cheese, along with salt, horseradish, and a beeswax candle to be consecrated. Some of the plain, red-dyed eggs (*krashanky*) blessed in this way are eaten with the Easter meal, and used in spinning or cracking games thought to bring a blessing upon participants.<sup>124</sup> Decorated eggs, according to custom, were distributed to family members, friends, and the clergy and placed on graves of recently deceased loved ones and ancestors.<sup>125</sup> The highly decorated *pysanky* eggs,

however, are preserved in the home and placed before icons on the family's corner shrine facing the front door as a blessing to the house.<sup>126</sup> In agricultural communities, *krashanky* eggs were placed in the barn as a protective measure to ensure good health to the livestock, put under beehives, and buried in fields to bless the acreage prior to plowing.<sup>127</sup> *Krashanky* eggs were likewise used in healing rituals to stop bleeding.

Reflecting this wide-ranging use and ritual significance at church, in the home, and on the farm, *pysanky* eggs are decorated with a wide range of designs, featuring images of the cosmos and the earth, sun, rain, spring flowers, birds, crosses, crops, livestock and even agricultural implements. Some of the oldest traditional designs are known to predate Christianity and are rooted in the ancient agrarian culture of Ukraine.

An old Ukrainian legend concerning the *pysanky* tradition recounts that an evil monster is chained to the side of a mountain and each year the eggs are counted. If only a small number of eggs were created that year, the monster's bonds would be loosened, allowing evil to spread throughout the earth. But if the people were observant and made



Top: Two miniature *pysanky* eggs by Elaine Vardjan, ca. 1990, private Collection of Elaine Vardjan.

Bottom: Ukrainian *paska* (Easter) basket, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Eastern Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic families bring baskets of food to the evening Easter Vigil service to receive a blessing from the priest. These baskets hold small, carefully arranged portions of the Easter meal, including elaborately formed *paska* bread, butter, cheese, ham, sausage, salt, horseradish, and Easter eggs. The eggs come in two types: *krashanky*, hard boiled and dyed red for consumption, and *pysanky*, decorated as gifts and blessings for the home, garden, and farm. These samples of blessed foods are traditionally consumed by the family to bless and nourish both body and spirit, and also to receive protection from illness and calamity.

many eggs, the chains would be tightened, and the evil would be kept at bay.<sup>128</sup>

This old legend underscores the ritual function of *pysanky* eggs as an expression of blessing and renewal, not only to one's own family and home but also to the entire community and the wider world. According to tradition, women inscribed *pysanky* eggs by candlelight late in the evenings after the children were asleep, while blessings, well-wishes, and prayers were spoken over the eggs. Only fertile eggs were used because these were believed to impart fertility to the family.<sup>129</sup> Although there were community variations in the tradition in Pennsylvania, similar practices were known throughout Eastern Europe by many names and artistic forms.

In the twentieth century, as much of Eastern Europe was consolidated under Soviet rule, many of these colorful traditions were outlawed for their religious and folk-cultural significance. Communities of Eastern European descent in Pennsylvania and locations throughout North America play a unique part in preserving cultural traditions, such as *pysanky* eggs, for new generations of immigrants who have fled Europe. Today's artisans must often explore new ways of learning about traditional culture as a consciously cultivated craft and an expression of cultural heritage,



rather than through unbroken family lineage in a home context. While this changes the nature of how such traditions are integrated into daily life, there are also benefits to embracing change and growth in folk-cultural practice.

Artist Helen Badulak is one of Pennsylvania's premier *pysanky* artists, and together with her daughter Nina McDaniel and granddaughter Kristina Schaeffer, keeps the tradition alive from their home and studio at The Artful Egg in Shoemakersville, Berks County. The family's work combines highly traditional geometric *pysanky* motifs with a wide variety of ancient, modern, and contemporary designs. A first generation Ukrainian immigrant and child survivor of a work camp during the holocaust, Badulak reunited with her family at the end of the Second World War, and resettled by lottery in Philadelphia. Although she longed to rekindle her connection to her culture through the traditional art of *pysanky*, no one in her community of Ukrainian Orthodox immigrants could teach her, because so many aspects of Ukrainian folk culture and religion had been outlawed by the Soviets.<sup>130</sup> Badulak became an award-winning, self-taught *pysanky* artist, and has been a torch-bearer for the revitalization of the tradition throughout the region. Badulak is now a nationally recognized

Traditional pysanky eggs, ca. 1980–2010, private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. Matthew and Elaine Vardjan, both public school teachers, were founding members of the Berks Chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen. While they focused on making folk art paper folded stars and relief prints, Elaine also celebrated her husband's ancestry by embracing the *pysanky* tradition along with the scratched egg tradition from her Pennsylvania Dutch upbringing. Together with their daughter, Rebecca Scalse, and daughter-in-law, Nancy Vardjan, Elaine led the family in exploring, collecting, and producing original Easter eggs. Two of these eggs (above middle) are the work of Elaine Vardjan. Another is by Rebecca Scalse (top) and one of the eggs (bottom) is unfinished, showing the wax application process before the dye baths begin.



master of *pysanky*, specializing in both traditional and modern expressions, and her daughter and granddaughter carry on the tradition. Collectively the three artists share more than a century of experience between them.

Blending traditional *pysanky* techniques and motifs with an interest in the regional culture of Pennsylvania, Badulak frequently made use of star patterns that were equally at home among *pysanky* eggs as they were on local barns and quilt patterns. Although only some of these could be considered strictly traditional, Badulak creates each of her eggs using traditional techniques, geometry, colors, borders, and textures.

According to Badulak's symbolism, the Ukrainian equal-armed cross intersected by heads of wheat represents the Cross of Saint Christopher, whose name means "bearer of Christ" and according to legend carried Christ across a river, later becoming the patron saint of travelers.<sup>131</sup> Although the cross and wheat are ancient symbols in Ukrainian agrarian culture, even predating Christianity, Christ became associated with wheat as a symbol of the Resurrection and the Eucharist. Thus the Cross of Saint Christopher bears the wheat in this motif, and reinforces the agricultural significance of Ukraine's leading role as the breadbasket of Eastern Europe.

Badulak also experiments with introducing design elements from Neolithic



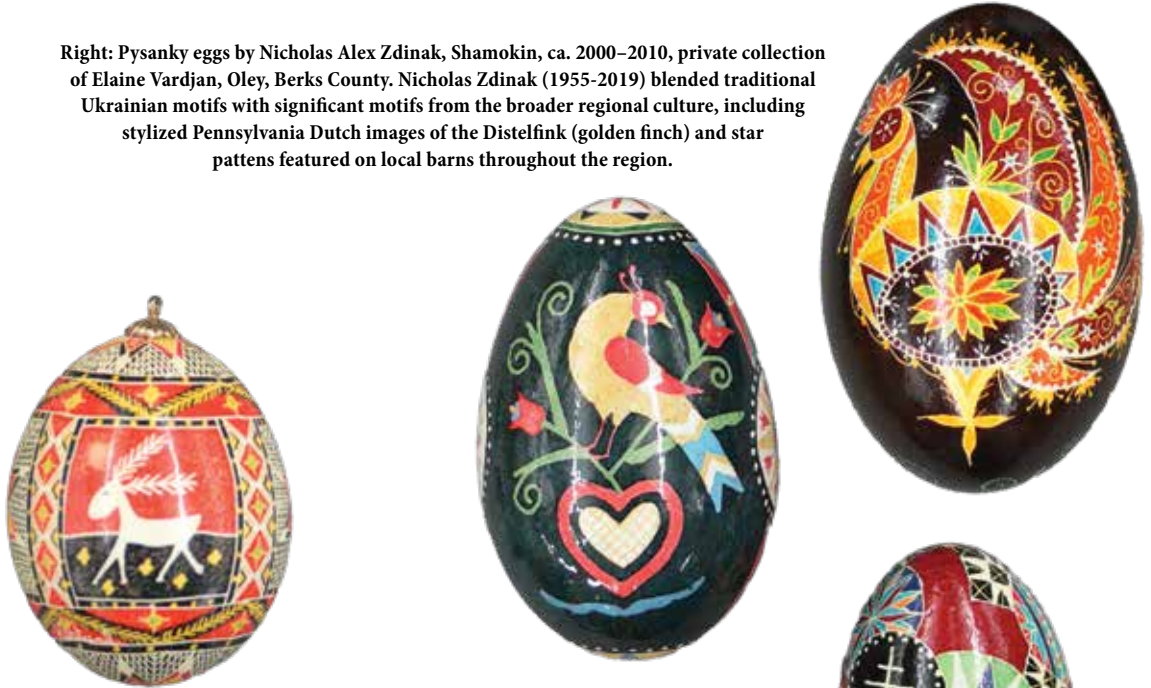
Trypillian pottery of Western and Central Ukraine. Archaeological evidence left behind by the Trypillian culture features robust artistic traditions in ceramics and matriarchal religious statues. Although no examples of decorated eggs survive from the Trypillian culture, other cultures have utilized similar motifs in early egg decorating traditions, and modern *pysanky* artists frequently employ Trypillian motifs out of an appreciation for the cultural history and heritage of Ukraine. Classic Trypillian designs feature curvilinear spirals, stylized animals, and flowing borders in three basic colors that reflect the ceramic arts: black, white, and earthen red. Helen Badulak's Trypillian designs feature fish, spirals, and pairs of snakes, symbolizing protection, as an echo of the serpent's ancient association with Zmiya, god of earthly waters and protector of the home in pre-Christian religion.<sup>132</sup>

Traditional *pysanky* star patterns are considered solar in nature. The eight-pointed star was once associated with historical veneration of the sun god Dazhboh in Ukrainian mythology, but was later used to convey Christian concepts of new life and resurrection. The eight-pointed star is often called *ruzha*, referring to stylized depictions of the mallow and other associated flowers, suggesting a correspondence between terrestrial and celestial geometry.<sup>133</sup>

As with any tradition, there are many voices contributing to the ongoing

Two Saint Christopher's Cross pysanky eggs (top), and two Trypillian-inspired pysanky eggs (bottom) by Helen Badulak, Berks County, ca. 2000, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.

Right: Pysanky eggs by Nicholas Alex Zdinak, Shamokin, ca. 2000–2010, private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. Nicholas Zdinak (1955–2019) blended traditional Ukrainian motifs with significant motifs from the broader regional culture, including stylized Pennsylvania Dutch images of the Distelfink (golden finch) and star patterns featured on local barns throughout the region.



Above: Ukrainian pysanky egg, Kim and David Kostival, Berks County, Pennsylvania ca. 1990, gift of the Reading-Berks Chapter, Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen. This intricately embellished pysanky egg was crafted by Kim and David Kostival. At the center of a complex lattice of running patterns is a stag with large antlers, an ancient Ukrainian symbol of the sun. According to Ukrainian mythology, the stag carries the sun across the sky each day on its antlers, symbolizing birth to death and linking it with the afterlife.



Above: Pysanky eggs and kistka, Wendy Hallstrom, Clinton, New Jersey, ca. 2015–2020, private collection of Wendy Hallstrom. Photo Courtesy of Wendy Hallstrom. For over three decades Wendy Hallstrom has decorated traditional pysanky eggs with familiar motifs such as the rose-star, cross, and a traditional Paska (Easter) design. The egg-decorating stylus, known as a kistka (right), is the traditional tool used to apply beeswax to the surface of pysanky eggs. Hallstrom shares her knowledge throughout Western New Jersey and the Philadelphia region through workshops and demonstrations, including those held at Glencairn Museum.





cultural explorations of Eastern European Easter eggs in Pennsylvania. Another accomplished artist from the region, Ukrainian-American *pysanky* artist Nicholas Zdinak (1955-2019) was born in Steubenville, Ohio, but later settled in Shamokin, Pennsylvania, where he created a wide range of traditional and contemporary *pysanky* eggs. A self-taught artist for over 50 years and member of the Yellow Breeches Chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, Zdinak's work reflected a wide range of cultural influences, including a distinct fusion of Ukrainian and Pennsylvania Dutch design, along with geometric motifs borrowed from Persian rugs and Moroccan mosaics. A Ukrainian Catholic, his work incorporated fewer symbols of the Orthodox Church, but used a wide range of images from nature, geometry, and even abstract forms.

In Berks County, Kim and David Kostival, two members of the Reading-Berks Chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen have been exploring the *pysanky* tradition for nearly 40 years, using traditional techniques and motifs. Their work features complex lattice work of running patterns that reflects the patterns of embroidery traditions as well as other ancient and contemporary motifs. One example by the Kostivals features a stag with large antlers, an ancient



Ukrainian symbol of the sun. According to Ukrainian mythology, the stag bears the sun across the heavens each day on its antlers from symbolic birth to death, through which it came to be associated with the land of the dead. The stag is a popular symbol which often accompanies the Tree of Life.<sup>134</sup>

It is well to remember that communities in Pennsylvania are never monolithic, but composed of diverse cultural traditions and influences. Blending their Slovak and Pennsylvania Dutch roots, Matthew and Elaine (Becker) Vardjan were public school educators and founding members of the Berks Chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen. Although the Vardjans primarily specialized in folk art paper folded stars and relief prints, Elaine celebrated their family's ethnic diversity by embracing the *pysanky* tradition of her husband's ancestry and the scratched egg traditions of her Pennsylvania Dutch upbringing. Together with her daughter Rebecca Scalse and daughter-in-law Nancy Vardjan, Elaine led their family in exploring, collecting, and producing original Easter eggs that are displayed annually in the home and have been featured in cultural exhibitions and educational videos. It is this willingness to share the arts

Three-star pysanky eggs, Helen Badulak, Berks County, ca. 1990, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Blending traditional pysanky techniques with her interest in Pennsylvania's regional culture, Helen Badulak often made use of star patterns. These patterns were just as much at home on pysanky eggs as they were on local barns and quilt designs.

and living traditions of one's culture that ensures opportunities for new generations to explore their roots and appreciate the traditions of their neighbors.

## Lithuanian Easter Eggs

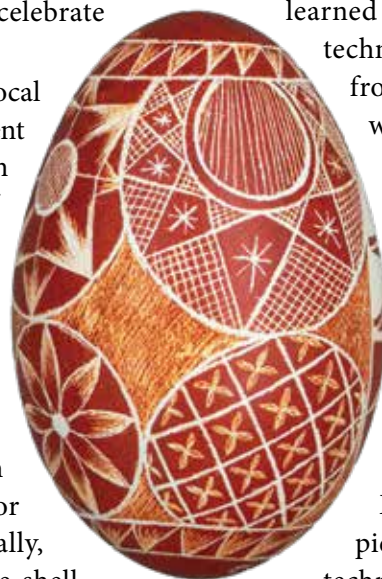
Located in the heart of Coal Country, Schuylkill County is home to the greatest concentration of families of Lithuanian-American descent in the United States.<sup>135</sup> Drawn by a strong network of family-based immigration, Lithuanian immigrants settled in Pennsylvania's coal regions to find work and community over the Blue Mountain, bringing with them their foodways, language, arts, customs, and folk culture. Although, like many immigrant groups, the language has substantially declined, many families turn to the arts and cultural traditions as a way to celebrate their roots and family identity.

One particularly expressive local tradition that is experiencing a recent resurgence of interest is the Lithuanian tradition of *Margučiai*—a method of decorating Easter eggs with either a scratching technique or with a wax-resist dyeing method known as the drop-and-pull technique. This method produces intricate groupings of distinctive teardrop shapes by applying melted wax with the head of a pin that resists color when placed in a dye bath. Generally, the wax is melted off to reveal the shell

below, but in some cases the wax is left intact as surface design elements. Although many of the most traditional examples feature white design elements against a dyed shell, the tradition has grown and evolved to include a wide range of expressions among Lithuanian-American families in Pennsylvania.

The Luschas family of Columbia County have become the most prolific bearers of the *Margučiai* tradition in Pennsylvania, and together they carry the torch to rekindle the traditions of the Lithuanian-American community in the region. Elaine and Alvin Luschas grew up in Mahanoy City, Schuylkill County, where they attended St. George's Lithuanian Catholic school.

While their grandparents spoke Lithuanian, it was not passed to the next generations. Elaine learned the art of the drop-and-pull technique for Lithuanian *Margučiai* from her grandfather at the coal stove, where they melted the wax. Elaine's aunt, a Lithuanian Catholic nun, Sister Norberta Swirsky (d.1977), specialized in Lithuanian scratched eggs, some examples of which she passed along to Elaine when she was young. Elaine taught herself the art form, and then instructed her daughters Christine and Carol in the scratched techniques. Elaine also specializes in producing pierced eggs in the drop-and-pull technique, for which she allows the wax



Lithuanian scratched Easter eggs, Christine Luschas, Columbia County, 2014–2019, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. This scratched Easter egg features a blend of traditional and modern Lithuanian designs in bold compositions. Produced on a goose egg, Luschas created a sampler of traditional geometric spirals, rosettes, stars, grids, and running borders. A prominent central spiral creates the illusion of "hatching."





Lithuanian eggs, Christine Luschas, Columbia County, Pennsylvania, ca. 2016-2023, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University and private collection of Elaine Vardjan. Christine Luschas, a Pennsylvania artist, is a leading figure in the revival of traditional Lithuanian scratched eggs. Using simple techniques, she creates a wide range of geometric and natural patterns. First, the eggs are dyed in a variety of colors, then carefully scratched with a razor blade to reveal the white shell beneath the dye.

to remain as a surface embellishment, combined with holes carefully pierced in delicate patterns.<sup>136</sup> Another specialty includes the use of colored wax to produce dimensional patterns on the egg shells that remain after dyeing.

While Carol Luschas has become deeply involved with Lithuanian language and heritage, Christine Luschas has become one of the leading artists of scratched Lithuanian *Margučiai*. After 20 years of scratching eggs, Christine has mastered the scratching technique, and produces Easter eggs with a combination of traditional and contemporary Lithuanian motifs, executed in bold compositions. Her work has been featured on the Martha Stewart Show in 2012 and has introduced the tradition to broader American audiences. Although she does not speak Lithuanian, Christine

is enamored with the folk culture and admires the diligence with which her grandparents ensured that their family's connection to Lithuanian traditions was not lost.<sup>137</sup>

Working with goose, duck, and chicken eggs, Christine carefully empties the dyed eggs before scratching them with the blade of a knife. Her distinctive techniques involve bold white lines and solid white areas, contrasting with shaded areas produced with cross-hatch or parallel lines. The combination of marks produces a pronounced dimensional effect.

One of Christine's signature patterns is a sampler of traditional geometric rosettes, stars, grids, and running borders, with a large central spiral that appears to be "hatching." Christine also produces elaborately inscribed images of stylized birds, floral

motifs, mushrooms, animals, trees, and star patterns, encircled by scalloped borders dividing the egg into front and back sections. Geometric grid borders often reference the elaborate embroidery that characterizes the traditional garb of Lithuania. Religious emblems such as the wayside cross, present a spirituality rooted in agriculture and appreciation for the land.<sup>138</sup>

Floral patterns are one of many ways that Lithuanians show their appreciation for the coming of spring in the season of Eastertide. On Palm Sunday, families create ceremonial Easter palms called *verbos*, which are consecrated in church and used in processions. This tradition is based on the biblical story of the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, when he was greeted with palm branches. Since palm trees are not native to northern latitudes, Lithuanians create bundles of native plants, such as willow, birch, juniper, or dried grasses, and decorate them with dried flowers and leaves. A *verba* (singular) could be quite elaborate based upon the tastes and artistry of the maker, and is intended to symbolize both the renewal of the earth at springtime and the redemption of humanity at Easter.<sup>139</sup>

According to tradition, *Margučiai* were included in Easter baskets taken to church for the Easter Vigil where they were blessed as part of the Catholic



liturgy.<sup>140</sup> Interestingly, among the Lithuanians, the blessing of foods such as Easter bread, butter, salt, ham, sausage, and cheese was not only meant to bless the Easter meal, but also to bless the fields, the cows, the chickens, the pigs, as well as the family by proxy.<sup>141</sup> Scratched *Margučiai* were not only given as gifts, but often buried under the threshold of the house, in the stable to protect the animals, or in the fields and orchards to ensure bountiful harvests.<sup>142</sup> Traditional patterns for both scratched and wax resist eggs tended to be geometric and distinct from the eggs of other regions in Eastern Europe, featuring distinctive radial geometric patterns, including suns, star bursts, blossoms, wreaths of wheat and other botanical patterns.

Flowers and herbs also play a key role in producing the natural dyes used in coloring the eggs. Lichen, apple peels, caraway seeds, and chamomile produce yellow dye, associated with ripening crops, while birch leaves, mint, nettle, rue, spinach, moss, rye spouts, and parsley make green, the color of spring growth. Symbolizing beauty and love, red is made from onion skins, carrot, cranberry, cherry and red bilberry, while sunflower seeds, juniper berries and beet juice make violet, the color of royalty and power. Oak bark produces black, the color of the earth, eternity, and death, while coffee, tea, plumb bark and hazelnut shells yield brown, associated with warmth and the soil. Cornflowers,

Drop-and-pull Lithuanian Eggs, Elaine Luschas, Columbia County, ca. 2018. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. Elaine Luschas learned the drop-and-pull wax-resist dyeing technique from her grandfather, who taught her over his coal stove. This method creates intricate groupings of teardrop shapes. In some techniques, but not all, the wax remains as a surface embellishment, along with pierced holes in delicate patterns. Luschas also drew inspiration from her aunt, Sister Naberta, a Lithuanian Catholic nun known for her scratched eggs. Some of these eggs, preserved by the family, have passed down the tradition to Elaine's daughters, Christine and Carol Luschas.



blueberries, and blue plumbs make blue, the color of the sky, and beets, radish peel, and raspberry make pink.<sup>143</sup>

The use of these significant plants and their associated meanings for dyeing Easter eggs underscores the interconnectedness of these contemporary traditions with the Lithuanian culture's ancient past, religious worldview, and agricultural relationships with the land. Even when far from their original homeland, immigrant communities create meaningful relationships through traditional expression, sustaining the culture, and renewing a sense of home for future generations.

## **BRINGING THE TRADITION HOME**

Pennsylvania's colorful mosaic of cultures and folk traditions provides new opportunities for people of all backgrounds and abilities to engage in a uniquely regional experience of egg decoration at springtime. Basic techniques and natural materials are widely accessible and can be obtained at nominal cost, making these cultural expressions ideal for home and family exploration. Since these folk-cultural traditions developed in the home, and often without specialized tools and resources, egg decoration provides an opportunity to bring families together and share their Pennsylvania traditions.

## **NATURAL EASTER EGG DYES**

The earliest Easter egg dyes were produced in the home from commonly available botanical substances that could be cultivated in the garden or foraged in

the landscape. A wide variety of colors could be produced when eggs are boiled with a small amount of vinegar, which bonds the color to the eggshell. The skins of yellow onions provide a russet range from orange to deep red. Hibiscus and red cabbage oxidize to produce a deep emerald green. Turmeric creates a vibrant yellow. Beets yield magenta, while berries produce a range of colors from magenta to blue and even purple. The shells of black walnuts form a dark brown. Some out-of-season plant materials could be dried to create dyes for Easter.

Although there are many local families that still prefer traditional homemade dyes made from onion skins and other natural botanical substances, commercial dyes were first introduced in the late nineteenth century and are widely available today. When general stores and pharmacies carried chemical dyes sold in packets, many families avoided them due to the perception that dyes not made from botanicals were poisonous.

The production of commercial dyes eventually became a profitable industry, due to efforts by companies that advertised commercial dyes as harmless and safe, such as Kauffman's Egg Dyes by J.R.B. Martin of Gap, Lancaster County.

Some of these attitudes about commercial dyes still prevail today, where families are experimenting with natural dyes produced by plants harvested from the garden or found in the pantry. Onion skins continue to be one of the safest, cheapest, and most effective way to dye eggs with a range of russet red colors. Dye is prepared by boiling eggs with



Above: Modern scratched eggs, Sarah E. Edris, Berks County, 2023, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.



Top: Kauffman's Egg Dyes, J.R.B. Martin, Gap, Lancaster County, ca. 1890, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. While some families favored traditional homemade dyes from onion skins and other natural botanicals, commercial dyes gained popularity in the late nineteenth century. These chemical dyes were sold in packets at general stores and pharmacies. Although Kauffman's dyes were advertised as harmless and safe, many families avoided chemical dyes due to the perception that dyes not made from botanicals were poisonous. Bottom: Natural Easter egg dyes, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. A range of colored eggs dyed (left to right) with onion skins, turmeric and onion skins, turmeric, blue berries, and hibiscus.

onion skins in a pot of water with a tablespoon of vinegar added to bind the color to the eggs. Cold-water dyeing is also popular, which allows eggs to be hollowed out or hard boiled separately. Dyes can be prepared by boiling the dye plants, followed by cooling and storing the dyes in jars in a refrigerator for later use. Hollow eggs typically require gentle weights to fully submerge them in cold water dyes.

Other commonly used botanicals, herbs, and vegetables provide a wide range of color options when made into a vinegar dye: turmeric (yellow), red cabbage and hibiscus (oxidizes to emerald-green), blueberries (blue), spinach (green), raw

beets (magenta), and many others. It is important to remember that vinegar should be used at a minimum to avoid compromising the eggshell.

## HOME DECORATION TECHNIQUES

A simple way to achieve complex patterns on dyed eggs is to adhere leaves or flowers to the eggshell before inserting the eggs into the dye to create plant transfer patterns. This can be achieved by wrapping the eggs in muslin or nylon, or with adhesive or rubber bands. The result is that the plant material serves to mask the dye, leaving a ghostly white outline of the plant on the surface of the shell.





Top and bottom: Elaine Vardjan of Oley, demonstrates the Pennsylvania Dutch technique of traditional scratched eggs at the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University. Middle: A scratched egg by Elaine Vardjan, private Collection of Elaine Vardjan.

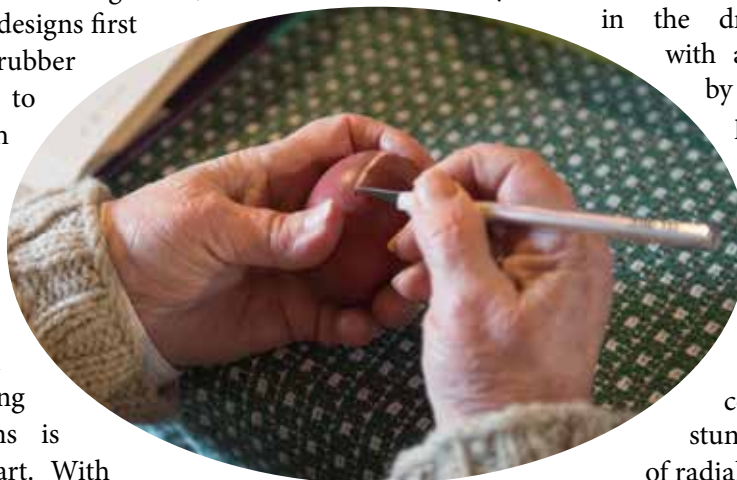
Dyed eggs can be easily scratched with the point of a pin or needle set into a cork, the edge of a razor blade or pocketknife, or a commercially available etching needle or scribe. The eggshell can be scratched with lines of various thickness, or whole areas can be carefully scraped to reveal solid white design elements. Geometric patterns are some of the easiest for beginners, and some prefer to draw designs first in pencil, or use rubber bands as guides to divide the egg with vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines for ease of layout.

One need not be an accomplished artist to scratch an egg, and beginning with simple designs is a good place to start. With



a little patience and perseverance, even a beginner can achieve satisfying results, and the process can be easily adapted to suit the needs of community members of all ages and degrees of proficiency.

A simple way to experiment with wax-resist dyes is to draw with crayon on eggs before immersing them in cold-water dyes. Wax can also be melted and applied in the drop-and-pull method with a simple stylus made by inserting a pin into a pencil eraser. The head of the pin allows a drop of wax to be carefully applied and stretched to create a series of extended raindrop shapes that can be combined to form stunning arrangements of radial geometry.



Appliqué is another process that can be readily produced with basic materials, such as paper, string, beads, cut straw, leaves, or other materials that can be glued to the surface of the egg. As with traditional rush pith and fabric appliqué, materials can be combined to produce diverse decorative effects.

Cultures throughout Europe traditionally decorate eggs with straw, a byproduct of grain harvesting. While some skilled straw-weavers painstakingly decorate eggs with bands of woven wheat straw applied to the surface of the egg in contrasting colors, this application of straw produces a decidedly different appearance than the flat application of cut straw pieces adhered to eggs in geometric patterns. Flat rye straw appliqué is common in parts of Germany, Sweden, and Eastern Europe, demonstrating the variety of effects that can be achieved with very simple, commonly available materials.

Wooden eggs can be a more forgiving surface to decorate than the fragile shells of natural eggs. Wooden eggs can be painted, stained, or decorated with appliqué, and are more resilient than delicate eggshell for beginners. Designs can be achieved with a wood burning pen through a process called pyrography that selectively brands the wooden surface. Grain painting is also popular and involves painting the wooden egg with a uniform neutral color, and then applying a thin layer of pigment mixed with vinegar to the surface with a sponge,

brush, or comb to imitate linear wood grain or the mottled appearance of a burl.

For those who wish to explore more complex cultural traditions such as Ukrainian *pysanky* and Lithuanian *Margučiai*, a good place to start is by attending a regional cultural festival for an immersive community experience in arts, foodways, and customs, such as the Kutztown Folk Festival, Lithuanian Days at Lakewood Park in Barnesville, the Festival of the Egg in Pittsburgh, and many other festivals throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Museums, cultural heritage centers, and arts organizations feature local workshops where one can not only learn Easter egg traditions through hands-on experiences, but also interface with practitioners of the art forms who are bearers of tradition in their cultural communities.

If you're unsure whether a particular cultural practice or tradition is a good fit for you, have a conversation with a member of the source community to learn more about the culture and ask questions about the traditions that interest you. While many traditions are practiced by those deeply embedded in their cultural communities, there may be many opportunities to learn about traditions that are outside of your cultural experience. It is always a good idea to approach such opportunities with an open mind and a respect for the lived experiences of the people that treasure and continue their cultural traditions.



Three Easter egg decoration techniques, private collection of Elaine Vardjan, Oley, Berks County. Top: Modern straw appliqué Easter egg, using flat cut straw adhered in geometric patterns. Middle: Plant transfer dye technique, adhering leaves or flowers to the egg to mask the white shell during the dye bath. Bottom: Grain painting technique, using a mottled dark glaze applied with a brush or sponge over a yellow painted wooden egg. All three techniques can be tried at home with minimal expense, experience, or materials.



Many generations have come and gone since the time when immigrants first brought Easter egg traditions to Pennsylvania. Today, the Commonwealth's diverse ethnic communities continue to inspire meaningful dialogue about the value of maintaining regional folk culture in an ever-changing world. Easter egg traditions are one of many expressions of cultural heritage that link the complex regional and cultural identities with artistic, religious, agricultural,

and ceremonial traditions. Although the traditional inheritance of cultural practices informally maintained in the home may at times differ dramatically from the self-conscious performance of these aspects of culture in the present day, new generations of families and artists are eager to share their traditions as part of a distinctly regional community experience, ensuring that these valuable expressions of folk culture will continue to grow and thrive throughout Pennsylvania.



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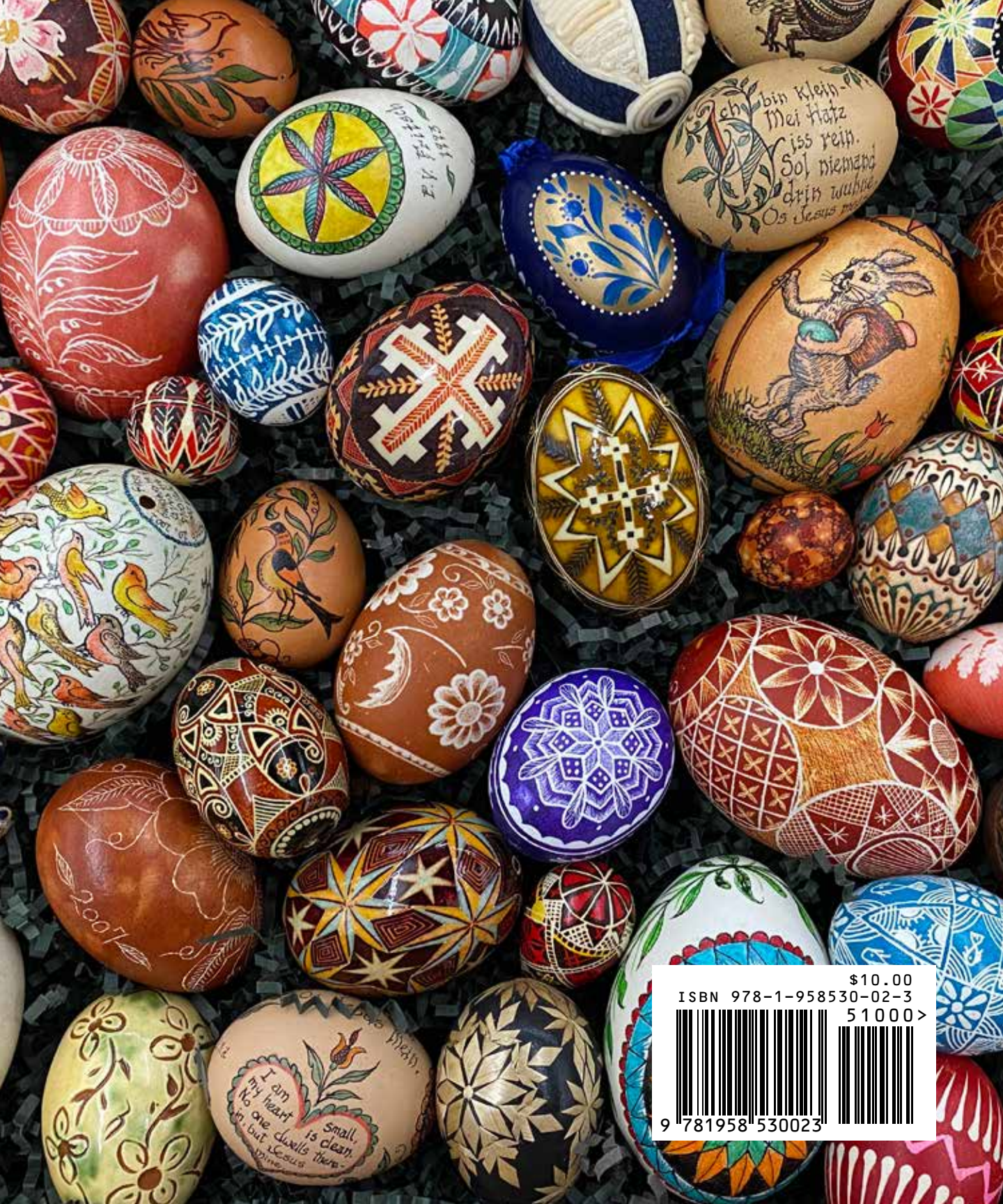
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87. Ibid.
88. The 1774 M.B. Easter egg from the Pennsylvania Folklife Society Collection was recently featured in "The Collection Speaks" a 30th Anniversary exhibition of the Berman Museum, curated by Stephanie Rowden in 2019. <https://www.ursinus.edu/live/profiles/5202-stephanie-rowden-virtual-experience>. Images of egg can be accessed as part of a virtual video experience (timestamp 0:18): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqw\\_lXviytw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqw_lXviytw)
89. Shoemaker 2000, 51-52.
90. Shoemaker 2000, 49.
91. Thomas Anburey. 1923. *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America, by Thomas Anburey, lieutenant in the army of General Burgoyne; With A Foreword by Major-General William Harding Carter ...* Volume II. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press: 288-293.
92. Grace L. Tracey & John P. Dern. 2002. *Pioneers of Old Monocacy: The Early Settlement of Frederick County, Maryland*. 1721-1743. Baltimore, MD: Clearfield Publishing: 117-123.
93. Shoemaker 2000, 57.
94. Lizzie E. Cammauf and George F. Cammauf are buried at Sinking Spring Cemetery, and Lizzie Esther Cammauf's death certificate, dated June 16, 1938, provides the names of her parents as George M. Peiffer and Hettie Sharman, also of Sinking Spring, Berks County.
95. From an example in the museum collection of the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.
96. Interview with Peter V. Fritsch at his home in Macungie, in fall of 2014.
97. Alexander Lawrence Ames. 2021. *The Word in the Wilderness: Popular Piety and the Manuscript Arts in Early Pennsylvania*. University Park: Penn State University Press.
98. Shoemaker 2000, 29.
99. Patrick J. Donmoyer. 2020. *The Easter Egg: A Flourishing Tradition in Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania Heritage. XLVI(2):13.
100. At the time, Brunswick Township was part of Berks County, as Schuylkill County was only established as a separate county in 1811, and later enlarged in 1818.
101. Donmoyer 2020, 13.
102. Karl Breul. 1906. "Hase" in *Heath's German and English Dictionary Compiled from the Best Authorities in Both Languages*. Boston, New York, Chicago: D. C. Heath & Co., 276.
103. Afterword by Don Yoder in Shoemaker 2000, 110; Hole, 69. C. Richard Beam 7 Jennifer L. Trout. 2006. *Pennsylvania German Dictionary* VIII:14.
104. Johann Conrad Gilbert. 1795-1805. Easter Rabbit. Colonial Williamsburg Object ID 1959.305.3. [https://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:58423](https://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:58423)
105. Shoemaker 2000, 45.
106. Newall 1971, 326-327.
107. Beam & Trout, VIII:14.
108. Phebe Earle Gibbons. 2001. *The Pennsylvania Dutch and Other Essays. With an Introduction by Don Yoder*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 404-405.
109. Shoemaker 2000, 45.
110. Simon J. Bronner & Joshua R. Brown. 2017. *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 4-5.
111. Evelyn Forkel. 2024. Marolin Manufaktur: History of the Manufactory. <https://marolin.de/en/Manufactory/History/>
112. Examples of all of these forms and techniques from the author's collection are illustrated throughout the text in Newall 1971.
113. Peter T. Priess. 2022. <https://ppriess.at/>
114. Newall 1971, 308-309
115. Alfred Shoemaker. 1950. "Is the Easter Tree Traditionally Pa. Dutch?" *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*. I(25): 2.
116. Newall 1971, 310.
117. Anne Ewbank. 2019. "How Easter Egg Trees Almost Became an American Tradition." *Gastro Obscura*. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/Easter-egg-tree>
118. Shoemaker 2000, 63-70.
119. Katherine Milhous. 1950. *The Egg Tree*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
120. Margaret L. Arnott. 1961. "Easter Eggs and Easter Bread of Southeastern Pennsylvania." *Expedition Magazine* III(3). <https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/Easter-eggs-and-Easter-bread-of-southeastern-pennsylvania/>
121. Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. 2001. "Easter Egg" *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*. <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/pages/E/A/Easteregg.htm>
122. Helen Badulak, 9.
123. Newall 1971, 192,
124. Arnott 1961.
125. Newall 1971, 167, 245.
126. This practice is still found among Ukrainians in the Greater Philadelphia area, and Southeastern Pennsylvania.
127. Newall 239, 248; Arnott 1961.
128. Newall 71, 218-219. See also: Olivia B. Waxman. 2023. "The History Behind the Ukrainian Tradition of Decorating Pysanky Easter Eggs." *Time*. <https://time.com/6166140/pysanka-ukraine-Easter-egg-history/>
129. Interview with a Bucks County Ukrainian American contact, 2019.
130. Badulak, 221-227.
131. Badulak, 124.
132. Badulak, 123; Luba Petrusha, Arnie Klein, Max Walters. "Symbolism and Motifs." 2018. [http://www.pysanky.info/Symbols/Symbolism\\_files/SymbolismandMotifs.pdf](http://www.pysanky.info/Symbols/Symbolism_files/SymbolismandMotifs.pdf)
133. Luba Petrusha 7.
134. Ibid.
135. A Historic Marker entitled "Little Lithuania," dedicated by the Pennsylvania Historic Museum Commission on August 10, 2013, in Shenandoah, Schuylkill County, states the following: "A center for Lithuanian settlement since the late 1800s, Schuylkill County's population has the greatest concentration of Lithuanian ancestry in the US. The coal industry drew many of these immigrants. The local Knights of Lithuania, among the nation's oldest chapters, celebrates and preserves its ethnic heritage. Rev. Andrius Stupinskas who led one of the first Lithuanian American Catholic congregations (1872) is buried in St. George cemetery." <https://share.phmc.pa.gov/markers/>
136. Interview with Elaine Luschas. February 20, 2024. Bloomsburg, Columbia County; See also: "A Conversation with the Luschas Family." 2014. *Draugas News: Lithuanian World Wide News in English*. <https://www.draugas.org/news/a-conversation-with-the-luschas-family/>
137. Phone interview with Christine Luschas. October 15, 2019.
138. Christine Luschas. 2015. "Scratching Eggs: Honoring and Evolving a Lithuanian Easter Egg Tradition." *Bridges: Lithuanian-American News Journal*. April 2015, 6.
139. Interview with Elaine Luschas. February 20, 2024. Bloomsburg, Columbia County
140. Nijolė Marcinkevičienė & Giedrė Ambrozaitienė. 1998-1999. "Easter." *Anthology of Lithuanian Ethnoculture*. Lithuanian National Culture Centre. <http://www.lnkc.lt/eknygos/eka/index.html>
141. Ibid.
142. Tamošaitis 41.
143. Antanas Tamošaitis. 1982. *Lithuanian Easter Eggs*. Toronto, ON: Lithuanian Folk Art Institute.
144. Luschas 2015, 6.





Ich bin klein  
Mei Platz  
iss reip.  
Sol niemant  
drin wuhne.  
Os Jesus



1971  
E.V. Felt  
1971



I am  
my heart  
No one dwells there  
Small  
is clean  
in but Jesus



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