

Homestead Happenings

Someone asked me "What do you do with all your time at the Homestead?" And "Do you ever get tired of being there?" The answer to the second question comes without pause. No, I don't get tired of being at the Homestead! Maybe the reasons I love it here lie in the answers to the first question.

In the three years we've lived at the Homestead, we've been building and nurturing. It was slow going at first since we arrived smack dab in the middle of the Covid pandemic. Everything was quiet and the lack of planned social interactions did allow for a time of slowness and solitude to put our roots down. Throughout that season we researched and studied to learn the mission and vision of the homestead. What is it intended for? How do we help make it happen?

I soon realized my role included creating an atmosphere of welcome and beauty. I'm not the historian in the family and my eyes glaze over if I look at a genealogy fan chart too long. However, I have not met many flowers I don't like and the birds and (most of) the critters around the homestead are endlessly fascinating to me. If you visit on any spring, summer, or fall day you will likely find me outside at some point in the day picking or deadheading flowers, filling the bird feeders, or spraying stinky spray on my plants to keep the deer away. Hours not spent outside are spent cleaning the small barn loft apartment hosted on Air BnB; or you may catch me washing yet another load of sheets or towels. You might also find me in the kitchen cooking a meal for friends or family. I grew up in the deep south where there was no shoe fly pie or sauerkraut; instead, you will see the odd things like cheese grits, turnip greens, and fried okra on my table. One of my favorite snacks is boiled peanuts, which I have been told by my Pennsylvania friends is "Just gross." If you ever want a taste of any of those delicious foods let me know!

My favorite part of living at the Homestead is the constant stream of visitors. How I love welcoming people for tours-- or a meal --or helping someone settle into the Air BnB. We have given tours to between 900-1000 people at the old house this year, and from May through the end of November our Air BnB and/or the barn space has filled up at least 80% of our calendar days.. Elam does the best house tours, and I am happy to show folks the flowers or a glimpse of our cozy living space that includes a peek at our badly burned and recovered rescue cat from Florida. Some of my highlights from the summer and fall of 2023 include:

- seeing sweet teenage girls around the fire pit roasting marshmallows and later engaging in a water balloon flight
- watching a youth group play volleyball literally all day, playing so hard the grass was worn bare from competitive spikes and dunks.
- listening to a little boy innocently ask, "Daddy, why did Nicholas Stoltzfus build his house so close to the busy highway?"
- giving many tours of the gardens with one of my memorable tours given to a guest from Holland who was staying at the Air BnB. There was a definite language barrier, but the lady loved flowers and she would say the names in Dutch and I would say them in English. When she saw the yellow rudbeckias around the old house, her eyes lit up and she said, "Oh, I know I know; in Holland we call those, Susannah of the black eyes!" The name has stuck, and it seems fitting for this cheerful flower to have such a lovely name.

As I look forward to another year, I am already dreaming of next year's flower beds. I'm planning how to maintain the Super Host designation by AirBnB. This helps the listing be marketed more favorably by AirBnB, which in turn brings in more guests. I look forward to feeding people even though I still can't make shoe fly pie.

Most of all, I look forward to having visits from people. It is a privilege to invite you to come and be our guests at the Homestead. We welcome you all! - by Esther Stoltzfus



Berks County Journey - Back in Time - by Sam S. Stoltzfus

On September 29, 2023 the Old Order Historical Gathering put together a bus tour that featured the properties of the 1700s immigrant Amish families that lived in Berks County. The tours plans were put together by Lloyd Weiler, Sam S. Stoltzfus, Isaac Beiler and Elam S. Stoltzfus. Ben Riehl assisted in the guiding the tour through Berks County.

The tour started 8:00 AM at the Muddy Creek Farm Library in Ephrata with about 70 people on two tour buses.

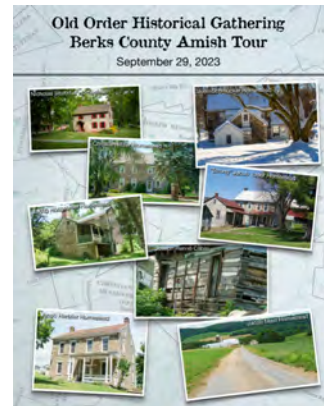
The first stop of the day was driving past the Daniel Miller grave marker along Hendl St. in Shillington and the Christian Miller house. The Mast twins married to the Stoltzfus cousins were connected to the Millers. The second stop was driving by the John Schmucker house in Parkside Drive in Wyomissing. John was married to Barbara, daughter of Nicholas and Anna Stoltzfus. The Schmuckers lived in the stone house from about 1774 to 1801. Along the way various cemeteries were pointed out as we drove to the tour stop at the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead at Wyomissing. Here the folks toured the barn and the old historical house. Elam gave a short presentation about the history of the restoration of the house and the replica of the 2011 barn. Following the Stoltzfus stop we drove past the farms of preacher Daniel Zug, Jacob Swartzentruber, Johannes Lapp, and Jacob Rickenbach. This led us up to the Irish Creek Valley region. Many of the Amish farms and families lived in the Irish Creek Valley in the mid 1700s.

The buses headed north on Wolf Creek Rd past the Stutzman place, coming out on old 22, and made a brief stop at the Melchior Detweiler stone cottage. The Detweilers settled in this area in 1734. The next stop was parking the buses at the old Roadside America parking lot we made the long walk back the lane to the Jacob Hochstetler homestead. The owner, Kevin Schlappich gave the group a detailed tour and talked about the native American attack that took the lives of the mother and 2 children. The father and two sons were taken captives. Following the Hochstetler tour we ate our picnic style bagged lunch at a local park. After stretching our muscles and having good conversations, we loaded back on the busses and headed to Bishop Jacob Mast old homestead. Along the way we pointed out the tiny stone house of the Stephen Kauffman home where they raised 10 children. Enroute we saw the homes of Strong Jacob Yoder, Johann Gnaegi, Christian Fisher and other places were pointed out.

The last stop included the Bishop Jacob Hertzler farm. Owner John Koinski had the path mowed back to the cemetery and this was a pleasant walk for everyone to the old cemetery. Bishop Hertzler had oversight of all the Amish church districts, including the Malvern church. He would walk 60 miles in two days to visit the Malvern congregation. Another important part of his leadership included sending wagonloads of food and blankets to Washington's troops in Valley Forge.

The tour was enjoyed by everyone and we all learned more about our family heritage and made new friends. After an enjoyable day we headed back south to the Muddy Creek Farm Library.

Note: If anyone is interested in a Berks County Amish History Tour, please let Elam Stoltzfus know about your interest. If there is enough of interest, another tour will be planned for the fall of 2024.



A few highlights of the activities around the Homestead this summer



Plein-air painter at the homestead



Family reunion gathering for lunch



Stoltzfus family reunion - telling stories



3 generations of Stoltzfuses with twins



Tour bus with a Masthof group visit



Tour group photo at the Homestead



Children enjoying the tree swing



Tour group from Stuttgart, Germany



Sisters and friends visiting for the day



Stoltzfus family stopped by for a tour



Mahlon Stoltzfus spreading fall fertilizer



Stoltzfus history lecture in the barn



This summer we had electricity installed in the old historic house. Sure looks good in the evening to see lights in the house. Its a welcoming sight.





Veste Oberhaus along the Danube River



The City of Passau view from the hilltop of Veste Oberhaus



1564 Ausbund Hymnal - oldest known copy - located at the Mennonite Historical Library of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana

Ausbund memories and stories about traveling to Passau, Germany

- By Elam Stoltzfus

Passau, Germany - Connections

In 2018, Nic and I made plans to travel to Germany, researching our Stoltzfus genealogy, later published in the coffee table book ***"German Lutherans to Pennsylvania Amish: The Stoltzfus Family Story"***. Although this was the main focus of the trip, the memories stirred of listening to the Lob Lied had awakened my curiosity of the Ausbund, and I wanted to travel to the Oberhaus Castle in Passau, Germany, where many of the hymns were written in 1535.

Before the trip, I sent an e-mail to the at Oberhaus Museum Educator, Eva Sattlegger, M.A. requesting a visit. In the e-mail I mentioned that I'm from Anabaptist descent, and I wanted to visit the dungeon where the group of Anabaptists were imprisoned in 1535. Eva replied and said, "Sure come on over, I'll show you around."

When we arrived in Passau, we had no trouble finding the Oberhaus Castle. It sits high up on the hill overlooking the city and the rivers below—the Danube, the Inn, and the Ilz. Every year, thousands of visitors travel to the 13th century hilltop fortress and museum.

On the second day of our time in Passau, Nic and I climbed up the steep hillside walkway to the castle to meet Eva at the castle for the tour. Towards the end of the tour, she took us to the dungeon where they thought the Anabaptists may have been held captive. We followed her as she opened a creaky old metal door from the courtyard, went down stone steps of a tight winding stairway, through low dark door-ways, and entered a small stone-lined dungeon. The dark dungeon room measured about twenty five by twenty five feet with two other cellar style rooms attached to it, and it had the feeling of an ancient cellar. I tried to imagine what it was like for the captives: long days filled with anxiety from missing their family and church members and fear of death by execution or being burned at the stake. The food was lacking, and the room was small and packed. However, despite these trials, the group composed 53 known hymns. They were songs of worship and encouragement; a chance to share their experiences and reminders to remain faithful to their beliefs.

While we were in the dungeon, I shared with Eva about my experiences growing up Amish singing the Ausbund, and how the Amish still sing from it today. Eva appreciated what I shared with her: I was the first person she had met that had firsthand knowledge about the use and history of the Ausbund among the Amish in America.

Eva shared with me that there was a professor at Passau University researching the history of the Ausbund, André Rottgeri. After Nic and I returned from Germany, Eva put me in touch with André, and the two of us began a long-running discussion of the history Ausbund. The next year, André invited me to return to Passau as a guest lecturer at Passau University. During that time, we scheduled a meeting at the university to exchange further ideas about the Ausbund.

There were ten people who attended this meeting: my son Nic and I, Eva Sattlegger, M.A. from the Oberhaus-museum, six professors from the university (André Rottgeri, Rüdiger Harnisch, Günter Koch, Tomas Sauer, Paul Davies, and Valentina Stickdorn), and Dr. Hienz-Walter Schmitz from St. Stephan's Cathedral. I began the meeting with a short presentation on the history of the Ausbund in the United States.



Passau lecture and meeting about the Ausbund



Ausbund concert at Veste Oberhaus St. George Chapel

In my presentation I shared a recording of song 105, page 565, Nun wolt ich gerne singen (Now I desire to sing gladly) composed by Hans Betz, one of the Anabaptist imprisoned in Oberhaus in the 1500s. The recording was from an American Amish singing. After the song played, Dr. Schmitz stopped me to make an observation. He shared that he intrigued by the slow pace of the song, and said that it sounded like the singers sang in a Swabian dialect.

After the presentation, I passed around my family's 1834 Ausbund for folks to examine. When the book came to Dr. Schmitz, he handled it with great care, inspecting the fraktur in the front, the leather binding, and the weather-worn pages. Before Nic and I left the meeting, I presented a new 2017 Ausbund to Hienz-Walter Schmitz as a gift. His eyes moistened, and his voice trembled: He told me that he never thought that he would own or hold an Ausbund hymn book.

I was encouraged by those in the meeting to continue my research into the history of the Ausbund. After returning to the United States, Dr. Schmitz and I began a discussion via email about the history of the Ausbund.

I made plans with Dr. Schmitz and Professor Rottgeri to visit Passau in 2020, but the global pandemic canceled our plans. I continued to discuss with Dr. Schmitz about the history of the original music to the 1535 lyrics. In our discussions, I asked him if he thought that the original tunes mentioned in the some of the songs could be discovered. He suggested that with some research, the original tunes could be found.

Passau 2023

After two years of research, Dr. Schmitz found a collection of most of the tunes that were used for the 53 Passau songs. We discussed the possibilities of a recital or performance at the Veste Oberhaus. As Dr. Schmitz made plans for a choral event, he continued his work on the songs by matching the words to the original melodies. Dr. Schmitz chose 14 of the songs to be sung in a public presentation. Then, he worked with the staff at Oberhaus Castle to pick a date and location for a concert: October 19th, 2023, at the St. George Chapel (St. Georgskappelle) located in the castle.

Two days before the concert, I left America for Germany. Joining me was Lloyd Weiler, a Mennonite historian and Director of Muddy Creek Farm Library in Ephrata, Pennsylvania.

The concert was held at a recently-renovated chapel. About 40 people gathered together in the chapel. In attendance were several professors from the University of Passau, friends of Dr. Schmitz, and people interested in this piece of the city's history.

The lights were dimmed, with our focus on the singers. Dr. Schmitz gave a brief introduction. After sharing about his research, Dr. Schmitz introduced the singer. He had chosen a local professional baritone vocalist, Sebastian Segl, to sing the songs in a capella, just as the prisoners would have done so 500 years ago. Wrapped around the songs was fictional narrative loosely based on one of the imprisoned Anabaptists.

As I sat in awe and listened to the perfect acoustical sounds of the heavy German lyrics sung by Sebastian and Heinz-Walter reverberating off the ancient chapel walls decked with the paintings of biblical characters. Emotional scenes bounced around my grey-matter with memories of my Amish childhood, today I'm traveling as a journalist working to capture this story, researching material that began with curiosity and trying to make sense of new journey and peering into the future to what opportunities may be around the corner.

I think it would be safe to say, that these selection of songs, sung to the original tunes have not been heard at Oberhaus since 1540. Several people commented on the content of the lyrics, the richness and meaningful reflections about God and the writers understanding the scriptures. Another statement was made that these Anabaptists had the presence of the Holy Spirit to able to write these lyrics. A presence of holiness, reverence, and reflection was observed during our time together in the Oberhaus chapel. In a real way, the spirit of worship found in these old hymns is still bringing people to a sense of reverence and relationship with God.

Although a few new discoveries were made and some historical information uncovered, there is still so much more to do in research, documenting the original sources and providing historical documents for future Passau events and sharing the Ausbund music story in America.

Dr. Heinz-Walter Schmitz shared that my visit to Passau sparked a renewed interest in this lost history of the 1535 Anabaptists in Oberhaus. When I asked him how he went about the research for the melodies, he said, "I realized pretty quickly that it was actually relatively easy [to find the melodies]. With the internet these days, that's where you look for a melody. It says at the Ausbund, for example, 'A Mighty Fortress is our God.' ... One cannot take the version that is in the last hymn book. You have to take a version from the time of 1540. Then you take the version by Johann Walter, which Luther knew. And this is, for example, an authentic melody from the time in which the Anabaptists lived. If they came from anywhere, they came from the Protestant and Reformed Church. That means they had the treasure trove of songs....they had these songs in their ears and knew them. And they knew other songs too. When they wrote their lyrics up there in Oberhaus, they somehow had this song in their ears. And then they wrote. Yes, and my work was just to find a melody that was printed somewhere on this text in the period, let's say from 1510 to 1530."

This Ausbund journey has been life-changing for many of us involved. Across space and time, we have been able to rediscover missing pieces in the history of the Ausbund, share Anabaptist culture and heritage with others, and forge connections between disparate cultures, values, and perspectives.

Closing Reflections

The rich hymns of the Ausbund have a way of returning, whether once in a life time or almost 500 years later. May the flame of the Ausbund hymns continue to ring true in our hearts and minds, continue as a moment in worship and praise, continue as a moment of reflection and renewal, and a continuing reminder of our historical beginnings as Anabaptists.

The group of us involved in the research of this Passau Ausbund project, it is our desire that this material be used for future documentation, the original tunes sung in worship events, the information used in educational settings and in future museum and heritage exhibits.

The Ausbund collection of hymns have been a vital part of the Mennonite and Amish Anabaptist history for almost 500 years. I'm sure the Ausbund songs were sung in the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, maybe during family time of singing or at the Sunday church gathering of Reading Amish church. Today there is an Ausbund copy of the 1748 printing on display in the Homestead.



Dungeon at Veste Oberhaus castle



Heinz-Walter Schmitz looking at a model of Veste Oberhaus castle



Entry way to Veste Oberhaus castle

Presentation/lecture about the history of the Wiedertäufers (Anabaptists) in Passau in the 1500s, the writings of the 53 Ausbund songs in the Oberhaus dungeon, discovery of the 1528 Propheten von Worms (book of the old testament prophets) located in the Passau Archives, connecting the Ausbund songs to the original tunes along with some travel stories.

By: Elam Stoltzfus and Lloyd Weiler

Date: January 26th at 7:00pm

Location: Muddy Creek Farm Library, 296 Wheat Ridge Dr, Ephata, PA 17522

For more information call 484-878-2916 - event is free

The Nicholas Stoltzfus House
Preservation Committee
1700 Tulpehocken Road
Wyomissing, PA 19610

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Reading, PA
PI# 415

Send a copy to a friend.

The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Preservation Committee board consists of the following:
Benuel S. Riehl, Chairman
Joseph Miller, Board member
Elam Allgyer, Board member
S. Nicholas Stoltzfus, Secretary
Debra Allgyer, Treasurer
Elam & Esther Stoltzfus, Executive Directors

Annual Benefit Auction Saturday May 4th, 2024

Accepting donations of items to be sold at the 2024 auction, including books, new and vintage.

Call Elam at 484-878-2916



Like and share the FaceBook page. A place to tell stories, share images, videos, and stay informed with updates.
<https://www.facebook.com/NicholasStoltzfusHomestead>



Our mission is to tell the Stoltzfus story.

A place where memories are made.

A place to bring families together.

A place to relax and relive history.

Newsletter design/layout by Elam Stoltzfus
Copy Editor by Esther Stoltzfus