

# Powwowing in Pennsylvania

*Healing Rituals of the Dutch Country*



A COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION

Glencairn Museum, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University

February 2017 - October 2017

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*Powwowing in Pennsylvania is a collaborative effort between 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 items from the Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer, the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, the Mercer Museum, the Thomas R. Brendle Museum at Historic Schaefferstown, the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, as well as the private collections of Clarke Hess, and Jim and Marcia Houston.*



*This exhibition of Pennsylvania Dutch folk healing manuscripts, books, and ritual objects is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Don Yoder (1921-2015), Father of American Folklife. Dr. Yoder's groundbreaking work for the advancement of the study of folk medicine was instrumental in assembling the contents of this exhibition, first through his research materials in the Roughwood Collection, and later through his assistance in developing the Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer, guest curator of **Powwowing in Pennsylvania**. Among the very first and largest of its kind, this exhibition encompasses a wide range of expression in the material culture of folk healing, and offers a rare opportunity to experience a diverse spectrum of spiritual and cosmological beliefs in Pennsylvania Dutch folk culture throughout three centuries.*



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# “THE HEAVENS ARE MY CAP AND THE EARTH IS MY SHOES”

## The Religious Origins of Powwowing & the Ritual Traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch

By Patrick J. Donmoyer

Religious orders across the globe, transcending all lines of creed and ethnicity, engage in ritual as an active part of spirituality in practice, prayer, worship, and gathering. While the particular aesthetics and functions of ritual process are often unique to each faith experience, the use of ritual is also a unifying element in human experience, serving as an effective means to create and define meaningful interactions, spaces, and outcomes.

Ritual is by no means unique to the religious setting, as ritual practices interpenetrate all fields and levels of society, shaping and integrating the domestic, political, occupational, agricultural, and countless other social realms into a coherent whole. At the very same time that ritual is universal and ubiquitous, the performance of ritual within a specific context can serve to both delineate and reinforce a distinct sense of ethnic, cultural, national, or religious identity, revealing and emphasizing as many differences and divisions within humanity as there are similarities. Rituals can therefore serve to both divide and unify, to dissolve and to reconcile, to harm and to heal.

Pennsylvania's tradition of ritual healing known as powwowing, or *Braucherei* in the language of the Pennsylvania Dutch, is one of many vernacular healing systems in North America that combines elements of religion and belief

with health and healing.<sup>1</sup> Informed primarily by oral tradition, powwow encompasses a wide spectrum of healing rituals for restoring health and preventing illness, among humans and livestock. Combining a diverse assortment of verbal benedictions, prayers, gestures, and the use of everyday objects, as well as celestial and calendar observances, these rituals are used not only for healing of the body, but also for protection from physical and spiritual harm, assistance in times of need, and ensuring good outcomes in everyday affairs. The majority of these rituals are overlain with Christian symbols in their pattern and content, comprising a veritable wellspring of folk-religious expression that is at once symbolic, poetic, and imbued with meaning worthy of serious attention and exploration.

In this traditional world view, warts can be cured with a potato and an invocation to the Holy Trinity by the light of the waxing moon. Verses of scripture are employed to stop bleeding from serious injuries. Burns are treated by blowing three times between cycles of religious invocations to dispel the heat from the body. A smooth stone from the barnyard can heal illnesses that prevent draft horses from working, and written inscriptions are fed to cattle to prevent parasites. The proper placement of a broom by the front door will protect



*Powwow Chair*  
Late 19th century, Manheim, Lancaster Co.  
Thomas R. Brendle Museum  
Historic Schaefferstown

A chair used specifically for powwowing, upon which patients were seated. Although appearing to be a normal chair in all respects, the following symbolism is attributed to it: The red paint symbolized the blood of Christ; the two arches in the cresting rail - the two tablets of the law given to Moses; the two large vertical stiles - the pillars of the church; the three vertical spindles - the apostle Paul, Jesus and Peter, the Rock; the front lower stretcher - the Judas the betrayer (upon which the patient should rest her right foot in disdain); the three rings on the legs - the Holy Trinity; and the low construction of the chair was to humble the patient to receive healing.

from malicious people and spirits, and a pinch of dust from the four corners of the house when stirred into coffee will prevent homesickness. Farm and garden tools greased with the fat from frying *Fasnacht* cakes will ensure a prosperous growing season, and the ash from the woodstove sprinkled over the livestock on Ash Wednesday will prevent lice. Wild salad greens eaten on Maundy Thursday prevent illness and ensure vitality. Eggs laid on Good Friday are concealed in the attic for protection of the house and farm, and are especially good for removal of illness.<sup>2</sup>

All of these ritual procedures are classic expressions of the powwow tradition once commonly practiced in Pennsylvania Dutch communities. These examples can either challenge or appeal to our notions of what is considered acceptable behavior for religious people, presenting a wide range of experiences that may overlap at times with formally-accepted, officially-sanctioned religious practice and those elements that may be relegated to a vernacular, or folk expression of religion.<sup>3</sup> Although these practices tend to be concentrated in the core region of southeastern Pennsylvania, they are not limited to the state, or even North America, and have been found in many places where the influence of the Germanic diaspora has spread, including Southern Appalachia, the Ozarks, the Midwest, the Dakotas, Ontario, and even Brazil and Russia.<sup>4</sup>

As part of a spectrum of traditional health belief systems in the United States, Powwowing within the Pennsylvania Dutch community is comparable to other folk-cultural and ethnic healing practices in North America, such as *Benedicaria* or “Passing” among Italian-Americans, Root-Work in the deep South, *Santeria* of the Caribbean and southern United States, *curanderismo* in the Southwest, “granny doctors” in southern Appalachia, and the healing traditions of the Cajun *traiteur*, all of which blend ritual, faith, and healing.<sup>5</sup> Despite obvious contrast with modern biomedical healthcare, these traditional healing systems are used in the present day as alternative and complementary medical practices that are blended with conventional care for the benefit of those who wish to engage a healing system that is sympathetic to religious and cultural values.<sup>6</sup> Powwow rituals provide the rare opportunity to examine the diversity of religious ritual in a healing context, and expand our awareness of the interrelation between

official and folk-religious patterns.

Although methods and procedures have varied considerably over three centuries of ritual practice within the Pennsylvania Dutch cultural region, the outcomes and experiences surrounding this tradition have woven a rich tapestry of cultural narratives that highlight the integration of ritual into all aspects of life, as well as provide insight into the challenges, conflicts, growth, and development of a distinct Pennsylvania Dutch folk culture.

#### OF WARTS AND WANING

Of all the powwow rituals that have been practiced in Pennsylvania up to the present day to restore health and healing, the most common of these are for the removal of warts. Ranging from trifling annoyance to painful excrescence, a wart is one of the most stubborn conditions encountered by the majority of people at least once over the course of a lifetime. Modern conventional medicine can also struggle to permanently prevent the return of warts, even after repeated treatments, some of which are painful or invasive to the patient. The non-invasive rituals used to treat warts among the Pennsylvania Dutch are some of the least complicated of all powwowing procedures in structure. These rituals combine poetic blessings, the use of a common everyday object such as a potato or a penny, and are scheduled according to the phase of the moon. Despite their simplicity, these rituals are perhaps some of the most integrated into aspects of everyday life, with far-reaching implications that overlap domestic, agricultural, and cosmic beliefs. This integration, coupled with a sense of universal accessibility – literally anyone can do it – has ensured the survival of these processes into the present day, despite substantial contrast with conventional biomedicine.

As a child, my first exposure to these beliefs was through my grandmother, who explained to me that her grandfather had powwowed away a tenacious wart on her hand when she was a young girl, using nothing more than a potato. His procedure was simple, and she recalled that under the witness of the full moon, he cut the potato in half, and rubbed each half on the wart. Then he put the halves back together and buried them beneath the downspout under the eaves of the farmhouse. All the while, he quietly spoke words in Pennsylvania Dutch, a language that my grandmother



Removing warts by the light of the waxing moon with a potato is one of the most common powwow experiences in southeastern Pennsylvania. Courtesy of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

had never been taught. Within a short while, the wart was completely gone.

It may come as a surprise to many that there is nothing particularly unusual about this experience among older Pennsylvanians. Although puzzling to an outsider, these types of common ritual involvements were neither scrutinized nor questioned to any great degree. It was not bothersome to my grandmother that she did not understand the words spoken by my great-great-grandfather, because the cure was understood to have been effective. Furthermore, she implicitly understood that as the potato rotted away, so did the wart.

Although the wart-cure is one of the simplest ritual applications of powwowing, the basis for how it is perceived to work is far more complex

than appearances would suggest. In fact, this wart-cure provides a glimpse into a system of belief that expresses and embraces a whole worldview.

The phase and visibility of the moon are believed to be crucial for this process, as a beacon of cosmic order, and an agent of change, growth, and dispersal. Echoing principles delineated in the ever-present agricultural almanac, the moon, as it waxed to full, was believed to exert a particular force away from the earth, powerful enough to enhance the growth of ascending plants, such as corn or beans, as well as affect the rise of the tides, or the wetness and quality of wood when cutting timber, or even promote the growth of one's fingernails and hair. It is no wonder then that this lunar force was believed to assist in the transference of illness to the potato, which, when cut

in half, has a cross-sectional profile that resembles the round, white, textured surface of the full moon.

However, close examination of the farmer's almanac would suggest that a proper potato crop was to be planted, not in the waxing moon, but when the moon is on the wane. This is when the moon's force was directed towards the earth, enhancing the downward growth of roots below the soil. By working against this commonly held principle and interring the potato in the waxing moon to cure a wart, it was believed that the potato would be more likely to rot away under the dampness of the downspout or below the drip-line of the eaves. This location represented the outermost boundary between the home and the outside world, separating that which is familiar from the unknown – a perfect, liminal place for the illness to be relegated until it is defused.

Although most recipients of ritual healing rarely hear the words that accompany these processes, as such blessings are often spoken *sotto voce*, these expressions are often descriptive of the ritual's mechanics and the desired outcome. The “moon prayer” that typically accompanies this wart remedy has been preserved in both oral tradition and written sources. One transcription, recorded in a doctor's ledger from 1830 in the Oley Valley, reads: *Alles was ich sehe das wachse, und was ich fühle das vergehe im Namen des Patri, Fillii et Spiritu Sancti* (All that I see may it increase, and what I touch, may it vanish, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Other sources use the Pennsylvania Dutch words *zunemme* (to wax, increase) and *abnemme* (to wane, decrease), relating the withering of the wart with the waxing of the moon in an inverse relationship that reflects the direction of the moon's force of influence. The word *zunemme* also has a double-meaning: both “to wax” and “to take on” – as the moon itself is thought by some to actually take on the wart.<sup>7</sup>

Verbal elements of powwow ritual, consisting of blessings and religious benedictions, are part of a memorized system of oral tradition, typically taught by a woman to a man, or vice versa. The rich imagery contained within these prayers, derived from scriptural and legendary narratives, is expressed in poetic rounds that are often metered and rhymed as part of their mnemonic function.

I learned a different variation of this moon-prayer from a traditional powwower in Berks County

just over a decade ago, and since that time I have had many opportunities to use it for friends, relatives, and neighbors. It is one of many aspects of the tradition that was taught to me by word of mouth that I was instructed to never write down, and to only teach it to those who would wish to learn. I deeply respect these admonitions, and will not be committing any specific aspects of my experiences with the oral tradition to print. These words are in one sense like a precious heirloom – a sentiment that I've heard from many who learned these traditions from older family members. In a very real sense, at the same time, these prayers are part of a living tradition, and should not be regarded as a mere relic of the past.

Just like prayers belonging to officially sanctioned religious activities, powwow prayers and blessings incorporate invocations and supplications to divine forces and saints. However, the objectives in powwow rituals tend to be broader in scope, closely resembling prayers attributed to the comprehensive system of medieval prayers to the saints, used for concerns as varied as safe passage in a storm or finding an object that is lost. While all prayers are in a basic sense a form of communication and negotiation with divine forces, powwow blessings also serve as the script for a distinctive form of cultural and ceremonial performance, engaging both the patient and practitioner in a ritual context composed of elements that are at once mundane, cosmological, and sacred. Central to many of these ritual performances is the use of everyday objects. Such materials are incorporated into ritual in a manner that contrasts with ordinary use, but echoes the role that the object plays within a larger context – supporting the notion that an object imparts some measure of the sacredness of life.

Other forms of the lunar wart-cure involve the use of chicken feet,<sup>8</sup> an onion, or a bone as the vector of illness removal.<sup>9</sup> In the last case, the bone is certainly not expected to rot away, like the potato, the feet, or the onion, but instead it is to be plucked from where it may lie in the barnyard, rubbed over the afflicted part, and then returned to the exact spot of ground from which it was taken. Similar acts of selecting, using, and replacing a stone are used for other disorders, such as sweeny (a form of muscular atrophy) or persistent nose-bleeds.<sup>10</sup>

Another type of wart-cure ritual involves the use of a penny to rub the wart, which when spent or



abandoned at a crossroads, would transfer the wart to the next person who possessed it. In these cases, while the moon still plays a central role in the transference, the accompanying words are quite different. A man from the Kutztown area once told me that “the butcher bought my wart for a penny.” This pronouncement echoes the Pennsylvania Dutch phrase used in such cases, *Ich kaaf dei Waartz fer ee Sent* – “I’m buying your wart for a penny.”

Still other accounts suggest rituals involving the counting of the warts as a cure,<sup>11</sup> echoing the old belief that warts could be contracted by pointing at the stars and counting them.<sup>12</sup> This act, though seemingly harmless enough, and certainly not worthy of divine punishment by modern standards, can be contextualized in light of Biblical passages where counting the stars is a power ascribed to God alone (Psalm 147:4). Even in the passage in Genesis where Abraham’s descendants are compared to the stars, the suggestion is that quantifying the infinite is beyond human abilities: “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them” (15:5).

Despite the fact that some folk-religious traditions, such as powwow, may resonate with patterns, sights, and sounds ascribed to earlier periods of a culture’s or religion’s development,<sup>13</sup> it is equally true that official expressions of faith are entitled to the very same privilege. But again, neither vernacular nor formal religion should be regarded as mere vestiges of the ancient, and instead, parts of a dynamic continuum of active relationships, informed by the past and working in the present.

#### LEARNING TO POWWOW

The original word in Pennsylvania Dutch for these ritual practices is *Braucherei*, which literally from its German linguistic origin describes an accumulation of customs, ceremonies, traditions, and rites derived from *brauche* (to use, to need, to administer or employ), as well as *Breiche* (customs, ways, traditions) and *Gebrauch* (ceremony, custom, or ritual).<sup>14</sup> A female practitioner of *Braucherei* is called a *Braucherin* and a *Braucher* if male. In the present day, as the use of Pennsylvania Dutch has declined in the core region of the Dutch Country, a practitioner is also called a “powwow doctor” or “powwower.”

In some parts of the United States, a powwower is also called a “hex-doctor,” which implies the

healing of illnesses believed to be caused, either unintentionally by a grudge, or deliberately by a curse, commonly known as a *hex* in both English and Pennsylvania Dutch. Any maliciously-intended ritual activity that is used to harm an individual or livestock is called *Hexerei* (literally, malicious witchcraft).<sup>15</sup> Like the word hex-doctor, use of the term *Hexerei* can also be ambiguous, and in some areas of North America it is synonymous with the word powwow; however, in Pennsylvania Dutch this word always has a negative connotation. The powwower’s role is not only to ritually cure unintentionally-occurring illness, but also to counteract the results of any malicious use of ritual that would produce a *hex*.

Despite the variety of nuanced terminology for ritual practitioners, not everyone who powwows would identify him or herself as a practitioner, which inherently implies specialization or vocation on some level. Years ago, when powwow was more common than it is today, a member of the family might powwow for anyone in the *Freindschaft* (an extended notion of the family, including friends and neighbors), and still not claim to be a practitioner. There are those who specialize in powwow as an occupation, but such a thing tends to be controversial, as payment is usually neither specified nor required. Although historically there have been powwow practitioners with highly lucrative practices, this is not common in the present day.<sup>16</sup>

Both of my paternal great-grandmothers could powwow, but neither would have considered herself to be a powwower in any formal sense of the word. Instead, both were familiar with common ritual cures that would have been known by many housewives of their generation. One of my great-grandmothers taught me a cure for hiccups when I was a child. The other lived on Hill Street in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, just a few houses down from a well-known powwower of the professional variety by the name of Reppert. In the 1930s and 40s, cars and horse-drawn buggies would line the street on a Sunday afternoon, when patients would come to see him. My great-grandmother would help out when the patients were too numerous, and she would powwow for those requesting assistance with childhood ailments, especially for “livergrown” children.

Livergrown is the English word for the Pennsylvania Dutch notion of being *Aagewaxe*,<sup>17</sup> a



condition once widely known across many early communities in America<sup>18</sup> and called by a variety of names, such as “hidebound” or “gripes.” This disorder is one of many culturally-defined illnesses that do not readily fit the language of modern biomedicine. Equated with infant colic, this disorder is characterized by abdominal pains and cramps. The belief was that these sensations were caused by the liver attaching itself to the inside of the body cavity, thus the word *Aagewaxe* implies that which has “grown attached.”

My great-grandmother powwowed for livergrown with a common process involving the use of oil, which was applied to the child’s sides with her thumbs. She would recite a prayer while employing a form of light massage. Although no one in my family remembers the prayer, there are two commonly recorded prayers for this process. The first is spoken in the dialect: “*Aagewaxe, geh weck vun meim Kind sei Ripp, yuscht wie der Grischdus aus sei Gripp gange iss*” (Livergrown, depart from my child’s rib, just as Christ got out of his crib).<sup>19</sup> Another prayer is derived from the standard German Luke 18:16: “*Und Jesus sprach, Lass die Kindlein zu mir kommen, und er segnete sie zu der selbigen Stunde...*” (And Jesus said, let the little children come unto me, and he blessed them at that very hour...<sup>20</sup>

Customarily, powwowing is learned by word of mouth, as part of an oral tradition that is memorized, consisting of prayers, gestures, and ritual procedures. Some rituals

*Left:* A powwower’s cane, also called a “throw-stick,” used as a wand for healing and divination, Montgomery County, PA. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

*Middle:* A cane wrapped with four carved serpents, used by a powwower from Hamburg, Berks County. Courtesy of the Mercer Museum, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

*Right:* A naturally formed spiral cane from vine, used as a powwow cane in Berks County. Courtesy of the Mercer Museum, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.



are for specific illnesses, while others are part of a more comprehensive approach to bless and bring balance to the whole human body. The oral tradition comprises perhaps the single-most comprehensive cultural repository for ritual experience, and yet is guarded by protocol which determines the manner and frequency of how that information can be transmitted. There tends to be a strong admonition against putting such memorized content into written form, except for personal reference.

With very few exceptions, this protocol requires a male to learn from a female practitioner, or vice-versa (and usually the bulk of this oral material is in Pennsylvania Dutch). Although it is unknown how this alternating gender requirement developed, it certainly has contributed to a strong sense of gender equality in the tradition. Female practitioners are as common and known to be as effective as male practitioners, although occasionally there is some specialization among women for women’s health issues. This gender requirement also excludes anyone from the practice with a tendency toward sexism – which would certainly be an obstacle to healing. When this tradition is passed down in families, it often skips a generation as it alternates. A grandmother might teach her grandson or a granddaughter may learn from her grandfather.

Rarely, when the tradition is held closely within a family, an exception to this gender-specific teaching can occur. Younger generations can sometimes gain firsthand experience by watching another family member powwow, without regard to gender. Sadly, it is much more common today to hear of such practices disappearing when a practitioner cannot find a willing pupil of the appropriate gender. As the language gap widens in southeastern Pennsylvania, and older generations of

native speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch are passing away, and few younger people are learning the language, the tradition has had to adapt in order to survive.

In keeping with this traditional format, powwow is typically taught only under the condition that it be learned by a person who intends to earnestly use it to help other people, and not for the purpose of personal edification, curiosity, or intellectual and academic interest, especially if this were to lead to public scrutiny or publication of sensitive materials. Even such noble causes as historic or cultural preservation can be highly controversial if performed in a way that compromises a culture's values, and such efforts must be done with the utmost respect and ethical considerations.<sup>21</sup> As with any traditional practice, powwow cannot be separated from the communities that it sustains, and therefore any efforts to engage or encounter this tradition as an outsider should begin by establishing meaningful connections with the community.

#### A CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

While simultaneously affirming and challenging the values of present-day Americans, the religious origins of Pennsylvania's ritual tradition of powwowing are a direct result of the blossoming of the transatlantic religious exchange of 18th-century immigration prior to the American Revolution. German-speaking Protestants and Pietists, consisting of Lutheran and Reformed church members, Moravians, as well as the highly persecuted sects of Anabaptists, such as the Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish, and a very small minority of Roman Catholics crossed the Atlantic in a mass exodus, and escaped the turmoil and destruction following the Thirty Years War and Louis XIV's destruction of the Rhine. Pennsylvania's English Proprietor William Penn's open-door policies of religious toleration provided an ideal destination not only for his own community of Quakers, but also to this religiously diverse group of German-speaking refugees from the German regions of the Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg, as well as Alsace, Switzerland, and throughout the Rhine River Valley. Each of these religious communities migrated from central Europe and adapted to the cultural climate of North America to form New World identities.

As the most ethnically and religiously diverse of

the original thirteen colonies, Pennsylvania provided the fertile soil for ritual traditions to flourish in the New World. Deeply rooted in the Roman Catholic consensus of the Middle Ages, revitalized by the post-Reformation mystical elements of Pietism among the Protestant population, the folk-religious climate of Pennsylvania was the new-world point of origin for a comprehensive system of beliefs that encompassed domestic, agricultural, and spiritual life. *Braucherei* in its original connotation implied customs, ceremonies, rites, and rituals that served to integrate these aspects of life into a coherent narrative.

Although the ritual practices of *Braucherei* are undoubtedly European in origin, the notion of powwowing – as the practice is known today – proceeds from a confluence of vastly different North American cultural forces. The term was appropriated from the Algonquian languages and incorporated into English by Puritan missionaries in 17th-century New England. In its original usage, the word *powwaw* among the Narragansett designated a medicine man, derived from a verb describing dreaming or divination for healing purposes.<sup>22</sup> Among the Puritans, this word took on a pejorative, and even sinister connotation, as the traditional medicine men and women were seen as obstacles to efforts to convert the native population in New England. Furthermore, because of this clash of cultures, the “powwaw” was equated with demonic practices by the English, and such stories were even included in mission correspondence by Matthew Mayhew and John Elliot to Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell.<sup>23</sup>

Based on this use of the word in early America, the term became synonymous with “magical rituals” in a derogatory sense and the Native American word was applied by early English-speaking Pennsylvanians not only to describe the ritual practices of the Pennsylvania Dutch out of some apparent similarity in the process of ritual healing, but also to indicate a sense of judgment about the perceived “otherness” of these practices. Furthering this notion of scorn, the connotation of noise was associated with such ritual practices,<sup>24</sup> designating the non-English Native American and Pennsylvania Dutch languages as being unintelligible or meaningless.

One of the earliest recorded uses of this word in the Pennsylvania Dutch context appears in the memoirs of Pomeranian immigrant George Whitehead,

Take a goose quill and cut it off where it begins to be hollow, then scrape off a little from each nail of the hands and feet put it into the quill & stop it up after bore a hole towards the rise of the Sun into a Tree that bears no fruit put the Quill with the Scraping of the nails into the Hole and with three strokes close up the Hole with a bung maid of pine wood It must be done on the first Friday in New moon in the morning

Manuscript Directions for Transferring Illness Into a Tree, ca. 1860-1880  
Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

These manuscript instructions provide a process for ritually transferring an illness into a tree.

“Take a goose quill and cut it off where it begins to be hollow, then scrape off a little from each nail of the hands and feet put it into the quill & stop it up after bore a hole towards the rise of the sun into a tree that bears no fruit put the quill with the scraping of the nails into the hole and with three strokes close up the hole with a bung maid of pine wood. It must be done on the first Friday in new moon in the morning.”

The timing of this ritual was crucial, for the new moon was believed to exert a force down and inward, driving the illness into the tree; it was believed that the movement of the sun westward would reinforce the same movement of the illness into the tree. Friday was considered a beneficial day to begin such an undertaking because of its association with the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday, and the initiation of the salvation and healing of the world in Christian tradition.

Plugged Oak Tree Remnant, Mid-19th century, [Schaefferstown, Lebanon County]  
Thomas R. Brendle Museum, Historic Schaefferstown.

Discovered by a farmer chopping wood on a farm between Reistville and Schaefferstown, Lebanon County. According to local interpretation, the tree was believed to have been close to a century old when the peg and ritual deposit was placed for transferring illness into the tree, over a century prior to having been cut down. One hundred twenty annual growth rings were counted from the bark to the peg.

The practice of “plugging” illness into trees is well-documented among many cultures – Pennsylvania Dutch, Lenape, and English. Early accounts provide details of this procedure, and evidence of “plugged” trees was still found in the 20th century.

Wer Gott vertraut? Und dem Segen  
Jacob's glaubt; Und an Jesus Christus  
glaubt: Der werde weiters Macht haben,  
als Teufel, noch bösen Thieren, noch Wuth.  
Das in das Loch in ein Baum gethan,  
und ein Wasser hinein gemacht, und ein  
Papfen darauf geschlagen.

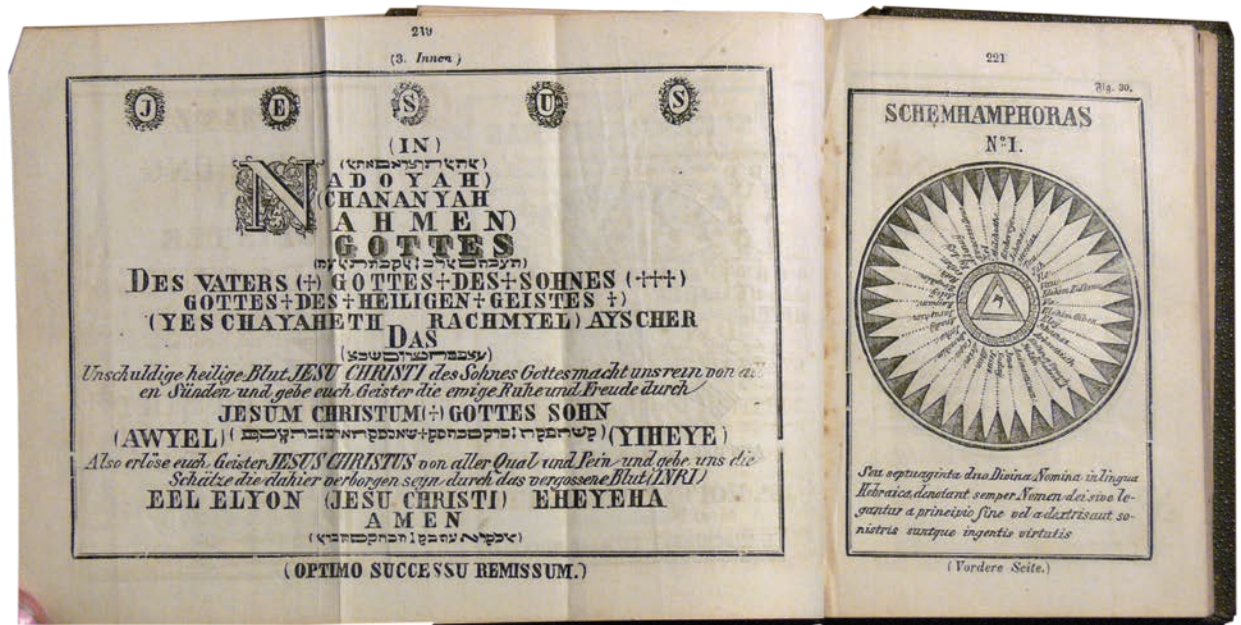
Das  
Papfen  
darauf  
geschlagen

in  
fanto  
cab  
ist  
der

fare. in. em: afa : Stmha :  
fare. in. fcha : fcha : hma :  
fare. in. mha : fcha : emha :

“Baum-Segen” Broadside Prayer and Tree Plugging Instructions, ca. 1790-1810  
Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

“Who trusts in God, and believes in the blessing of Jacob and in Jesus Christ, will have the power to overcome the Devil, wild animals, and danger. Put it into a hole in a tree, and urinate into it, and hammer a plug thereafter. Tree, God bless me.” This broadside also has cryptic inscriptions that follow, which appear to be written in cypher.



A fold-out print from the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, with Latin, Hebrew and German inscriptions. This work was alleged to be the extra-biblical writings of the ancient Hebrews and Christian Cabalists, but was first compiled from manuscript sources in the 1840s by German publisher Johann Scheibel, and sold as part of a series on ceremonial magic. Shortly thereafter it became one of the most widely circulated works to inspire folk ritual practice on both sides of the Atlantic. The work has a sinister connotation in Pennsylvania, however, as it includes instructions for casting the seven plagues that Moses visited upon Egypt, as well as instructions for spirit conjuration. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

who composed his transatlantic autobiography for posterity in English in Berks County, Pennsylvania in 1795. He recalls an experience from his early life as a servant in Pomerania, when a local hangman performed a ritual to cure him of the bite of a dog believed to have rabies. In keeping with his English presentation of the narrative, Whitehead describes his skeptical master's negative reaction to "powouring."<sup>25</sup> Despite its obvious anachronism on the lips of a European, this citation indicates an already well-established Americanism just before the turn of the 19th century and confirms a sense of ambivalence in connotation – both as a widely accepted term for ritual healing, but also one that may come with a sense of judgment.

Powwow is the most common term for the tradition in the present day, and as the everyday use of Pennsylvania Dutch has declined, awareness of the origin of the word powwow is also limited. It is a common perception, despite copious evidence to the contrary, that the practice was derived from contact with Native Americans. Others, perhaps confused about the origins of the word powwow, have

suggested that the tradition was based upon, or at least enhanced by, a desire to imitate or "play Indian," as a way for Americans of European descent to explore the exotic stereotypes of the indigenous experience.<sup>26</sup> Both of these perceptions of the practice are perhaps the result of a limited understanding, not only of the role and development of powwow as an English word in Pennsylvania, but also of the range of folk-religious experience in the United States – so much so that these types of non-sanctioned ritual practices are perceived to be out of place or exotic when practiced by Americans of European stock. These ritual practices are so frequently omitted and rarely discussed as part of the well-accepted narratives of early American and European history, that one can hardly begrudge bearers of the notion that powwow must have been borrowed from someone or somewhere else.

This idea of cultural borrowing, however, is wound in and through the *Braucherei* experience in both a syncretic and attributive sense, as even in Europe, rituals of Germanic cultural origin were once idealized as expressions popularly believed to have proceeded from Egyptian, "Gypsy (Romani),"



An illustrated frontispiece of the Gypsy King of Egypt - a legendary author in Pennsylvania's powwowing literature, bearing a frisian cap, stylus and book. *Verschiedene Sympathetische und Geheime Kunst-Stücke (Various Sympathetic and Secret Formulae)*, ca. 1800. PA German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.

Roman, or Jewish sources.<sup>27</sup> While some of these influences are confirmed (such as occasional references to the Roman author Pliny the Elder), in general this form of cultural appropriation, especially that which concerned the Jewish or Romani element, says more about the idealized perceptions of the culture doing the borrowing, rather than any accurate representation of the culture from which certain ideas may or may not have actually been borrowed.

In most cases extra-cultural elements serve a particular function, while indulging a sense of exoticism. Some materials attributed to the Romani people (falsely believed to have come from Egypt)<sup>28</sup> are thought to have great ceremonial and magical power, whereas texts or sources derived from Hebrew are believed to carry with them a sense of ancient biblical authority and power.<sup>29</sup> At the same time,

objectification goes both ways, and can even become a means to condemn: some have blamed the diversity of early Pennsylvanian Christian ritual practices on the latent presence of a pagan or heathen frame of mind, and while there is a level of truth to the ancient precedents and origins of many religious practices, certainly both official and folk forms of religion maintain some measure of this ancient influence.

This ambivalence about the religious origins of Pennsylvania's ritual traditions, and hesitancy to claim ownership in origin or practice, is not merely out of perceived exoticism, but especially the result of changes in doctrinal, theological, and institutional structures of religion, whereby change is part of an official and authoritative process, determining which aspects of religion will be endorsed, and what is to be discouraged. A general sense of "correctness" is associated with endorsement, while discouragement or prohibitive sanctioning determines what is considered "deviant," "unorthodox," or even "heresy."

On the other hand, folk religion, as a parallel trend of ever-changing, non-sanctioned religious experience, has a tendency to maintain some portion of that which has been discarded by orthodox religion, especially when those discarded elements are part of a cultural, regional, or ethnic expression linked to a community identity. For this very reason, Pennsylvania Dutch culture unconsciously maintained a certain level of historical Roman Catholic elements despite its predominantly Protestant culture. Invocations to the Virgin Mary and the whole hierarchy of specific saints for the healing of precise ailments, liturgical prayers such as the Ave Maria used within the context of penance, as well as the use of objects or places considered holy or sacred – these are just some of the ritual elements proceeding directly from a Roman Catholic past that are interwoven into Pennsylvania Dutch culture.<sup>30</sup> Although none of these elements are expressed within the corpus of officially sanctioned religious experience in the Protestant churches and adherence to these practices may at times be invisible to the clergy, the membership of the churches may express these traditions in the home or other private venues where their role and ritual function within domestic, agricultural, and healing traditions is affirmed.



122

auch um vergängliche Dinge mich nicht  
bestimmere, sondern in fester Hoffnung



und inbrünstiger Liebe zu  
Geist aufgabe, Amen.  
Von 2 Uhr des Nachts  
solle für mich St. Joseph,  
G e b e t.  
O heil. Joseph! du al-  
lerreins-  
Gespons  
der allerreins-

123

Gottes und ihres eingebornen Sohnes  
allerreinsker Pfleger und Erzieher,  
der du in deinem Erbthumlein zum



Geistlicher  
**Schild,**

Gegen geistliche und leibliche  
Gefährlichkeiten  
Allheit bey sich zu tragen.

Darinn  
Sehr kräftige Segen  
und Gebet, so theils von Gott  
offenbahret, theils von der Sun-  
den und heiligen Vätern  
gemacht.

Und von Urbano VIII. Pp.  
zum Trost aller Christgläu-  
bigen, sonderlich deren, so zu  
Wasser oder zu Land reisen, damit  
sie durch Krafft dieses bey sich  
tragenden Schildes von vie-  
len Gefahren erhalten  
werden.

(37)  
St. Johannes \* Evange-  
lium.

Dies Evangelium ist sehr kräftig  
gegen das Ungewitter, Oer-  
ten, so man bey sich trägt, und  
in Gefahren anständig bracht.  
Zum ersten bezeichne dich mit  
dem Namen deine Stirn, Mund  
und Brust,prechend:  
Im Namen Gottes des f-  
vatters, und des f- Sohnes,  
und des f- Heiliges, Amen.  
Zum Anfang war das Wort,  
I und das Wort war bey  
das Wort; Dasselbe war im  
Anfang bey GOTT. Alle  
Ding seynd durch dasselbe  
gemacht, und ohne dasselbe ist  
nichts

Ein schöner  
und  
wahr approbirter  
**Heil. Segen**

zu  
**Wasser und Land.**  
mit der  
alle seine Sünde, so  
ihm begegnen auf allen  
seinen Wegen und  
Strecken.

†  
J. H. S.  
†

Erstl. gedruckt zu Prag.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC ROOTS OF POWWOW

Although the religious climate of Pennsylvania was decidedly Protestant from the onset, the early folk culture was still deeply rooted in centuries-old, pre-Reformation beliefs and observances, some of which are still maintained today.<sup>31</sup> These attitudes and practices are often mistaken for theological or doctrinal castoffs from previous generations, rather than part of a distinctly European worldview, interwoven not only through the ages, but also throughout the total sphere of life.

During the Middle Ages, by the time that the culture of Christianity rose to ascendancy from the fall of the Roman world, Europe was already on a new religious trajectory that would serve to redefine the sacred and transform devotional practices. The development of the cult of the saints would be one of the defining factors in this transition, as the remains of the faithful departed and their devotional shrines replaced the civic centers of Roman life.<sup>32</sup> The remains and relics of the martyrs delineated a new spiritual topography that spread across Europe, plotting the routes of the pilgrimage, determining the sites of Gothic cathedrals, and consolidating religious authority.

These ancestors of a spiritual family, saints and martyrs, served not only as holy intercessors capable of touching the lives of mortals, but also as human faces that mediated contact with a heavenly, supernal reality.<sup>33</sup> Never before had Earth and the heavens seemed to so closely intersect. The saints were considered irrefutable evidence that the sacred could take physical form, and every physical manifestation of creation was the result of a spiritual counterpart. At the same time, the ever-growing hierarchy of the clergy merged with a heavenly order that encompassed the very choirs of heaven, the patriarchs and prophets, the Saints and Apostles, the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and the Infant Christ, and above all, the ineffable mystery of the Holy Trinity.

However, the earth was also a realm of great peril, as the devil and the forces of darkness were given free reign to bring calamity and misfortune, illness and

infirmity, pestilence and plague.<sup>34</sup> But the sufferings of humanity were not only to be relieved in the salvation of the afterlife, but in the restoration of the natural order and healing of the flesh through contact with the sacred.<sup>35</sup> Holy sites, objects, and people were the answer to this mortal conundrum, and served not as reminders of distant heavenly realities, but as proof of divine immanence.

Even when one's station in life did not permit direct contact with the sacrosanct, prayers and petitions to the saints could be offered to bless and assist in all earthly affairs and heal all infirmities. Blessed inscriptions on paper and fabric as well as medals stamped with the images of the saints could be worn on one's body to guide and protect in daily life, on journeys, and in times of war.<sup>36</sup> A sacred calendar, reflecting the movements of the heavens as beacons of cosmic order, synchronized the days, months, and seasons with a cyclical pattern of veneration and devotion, and every transition in life was given a special liturgical rite and benediction – from birth to death.<sup>37</sup> The health of a person extended beyond his or her physical body, to include family and neighbors, home and farmyard, barns and livestock, fields and crops, and seamlessly joined a universal order that stretched to the four corners of the earth, and was reflected in all creation.

This concept of the sacred was so integrated into all aspects of life and proved to be so incredibly stable that even when the rise of the Reformation and Renaissance would shake Europe to its very core, this cosmic arrangement persisted and colored later expressions of religious piety and everyday life by shades and degrees. Even centuries later, after changes in theology, science, fashion, and economy, prayers that appeal to the saints would continue to describe these heavenly hierarchies:

Today I rise and tend to the day which I have received, in thy name: The first is God the Father †, the other is God the Son †, the third is God the Holy Ghost † – Protect my body and soul, my flesh and my life, which Jesus, the Son of God himself, has given to me; whereupon shall I be blessed, as the Holy Bread of Heaven that our loving Lord Jesus, the Son of God, had given to his disciples.

*Der Wahre Geistliche Schild, Heiliger Segen, und Geistliche Schild-Wacht (The True Spiritual Shield, The Holy Blessing, and Spiritual Shield Vigil).*  
Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

Three editions of the classic compilation of European 16th-century benedictions, prayers, and blessings for protection from danger, evil spirits and plague. These works, while largely unknown today, were once frequently recorded in manuscript form throughout Pennsylvania and used for powwowing, as well as printed in Reading and Erie, Pennsylvania, as well as Cincinnati, Ohio. The two open, hard-backed editions were owned by Pennsylvanians.



Clockwise Right: European *Brevel*, Austrian dialect for a little protective letter, featuring the Caravaca Cross, 18th century; colored etching *Glückselige Haussegnen* (Sacred House Blessing) with the Virgin Mary and the monograph of the Three Kings, CMB, and the *Segen-Stern*, a six-pointed star with the letters IEHOVA spread across the points, 19th Century, Munich; small *Gnadenbild* (Holy Image) of the Virgin Mary, which was physically touched to the Holy Image of the Virgin Mary in Passau, Lower Bavaria,<sup>38</sup> 18th century; *Die heiligen sieben Himmels-Riegel* (The Seven Holy Bars of Heaven), a protective prayer allegedly given to a hermit by his guardian angel, Cologne, Germany; three *Fraisen-Steine* (Epilepsy Stones) cast from zinc with images of the saints, carried by epileptics for deliverance from seizures; *Die sieben Heiligen Schloß*. (The Seven Holy Seals) a seven-fold prayer for protection, claiming to have been printed "on the German press in Jerusalem," 19th century. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

When I go out from the house over the threshold and into the streets, Jesus † Mary † Joseph †, the Holy Three Kings, Caspar †, Melchior † and Balthasar † are my travel companions – the Heavens are my hat and the Earth is my shoes. These six holy persons accompany me and all that are in my house, and when I am on the streets, so shall they protect my journey, from thieves, murderers, and malicious people. All those who meet me must have love and value for me. Therefore help me God the Father †, God the Son †, God the Holy Ghost †, Jesus, † Mary, † Joseph, † Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, and the Four Evangelists be with me in all my doings, trade and commerce, going and coming, be it on water or land, before fire and inferno, they will protect me with their strong hand. To God the Father †, I reveal myself – to God the Son †, I commend myself – in God

the Holy Ghost †, I immerse myself. The glorious Holy Trinity be above me, Jesus, Mary and Joseph before me, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar be behind and beside me through all time, before I come into eternal joy and bliss, help me Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Caspar † Melchior † and Balthasar †, pray for us now, and in the hour of our death. Amen.<sup>39</sup>

This *Powerful Prayer* (*Ein sehr kräftiges heiliges Gebet*) originates in the city of Cologne, at the Cathedral dedicated to the Three Kings, but was used and published just before the turn of the 20th century in Kutztown, the heart of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. This prayer may seem about as far removed from the rational theology and humble piety to be expected of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations



as could be imagined, that is, until one compares it with other prayers associated with powwowing, where rituals may conclude with making the sign of the cross three times, followed by the Ave Maria in series with penitential recitations of the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. While the latter two expressions were certainly at the core of Protestant expressions of faith, nevertheless this ritual context was wholly foreign to the offices of the Protestant churches.

Despite the implications of such Roman Catholic elements in Protestant communities, the Pennsylvania Dutch had certainly not forgotten that the celebrated image of Dr. Martin Luther graced the inside covers of not only their German Bibles, but also early Pennsylvania prayer books, and even their children's spelling-books and grammars. The spirit of the Reformation that inspired the transatlantic migration was hardly forgotten in the New World, and Pennsylvania, founded as a colony with no state-mandated religious requirements, was a perfect place for religious expression to flourish.

It would appear that these vestigial elements of Roman Catholicism within folk culture did not merely survive in spite of Protestantism, but were fundamentally transformed and possibly invigorated by it. As the prayers to the saints and a reverence to their shrines and relics were removed from the official realm of religious expression, it was within the home that these traditions continued to grow and change into a fundamentally new creature,

no longer informed by the doctrines and reinforced by the sanctioning of the official Protestant churches – but thriving nonetheless as a familial form of devotion.

The early Christian martyrs, largely forsaken by Protestant authorities, make their appearances throughout the oral and literary ritual healing traditions in Pennsylvania. Prayers for burns were used in Pennsylvania invoking St. Lawrence, martyred on an iron griddle, and prayers to St. Blaise were used for menstrual complications. St. George and St. Martin were invoked to thwart highway robbers, and St. Cyprian against curses and malicious people.<sup>40</sup> The “Three Holy Women,” Sts. Elizabeth, Bridgid, and Matilda, were invoked to cure swelling.<sup>41</sup> The Biblical saints, patriarchs, and protagonists receive equal treatment, each with their specialized invocations: the Virgin Mary for extinguishing fire and healing burns; and St. Peter for binding and releasing thieves.

The names of the four Evangelists were used to bless the body against illness and danger. The “Three Holy Men,” Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were invoked to cure inflammation, and their “song” in the fiery furnace was good to protect from destruction by fire, storms, infant convulsions, and the bite of a mad dog.<sup>42</sup>

These unofficial traditions served to nurture parts of the human experience that no longer had a place within public, post-enlightenment Protestant expression, especially under the careful watch of Lutheran and Reformed clergy, many of whom were educated at European universities, further dividing them from their North American



Above: Blessing made for Emma Jane Weidner, 1887, by Dr. Joseph H. Hageman of Reading, Pennsylvania. Hageman's blessings were derived verbatim from European collections of folk-religious blessings, such as the *Geistlicher Schild* (*Spiritual Shield*) and the works attributed to Saint Albertus Magnus. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.



Left: Drei-Königzettel (Three Kings Broadside), late 18th century. Heilmann Collection.

A European broadside of the Three Kings Prayer, which was later republished in Pennsylvania, most notably, in Kutztown by Ulrich & Gehring ca. 1880. This prayer developed in the wake of veneration of the Three Kings following the moving of their legendary remains to the cathedral in Cologne. The prayer appeals to the Three Kings, symbolized by the initials C+M+B for protection against natural disaster and the predations of the wicked.

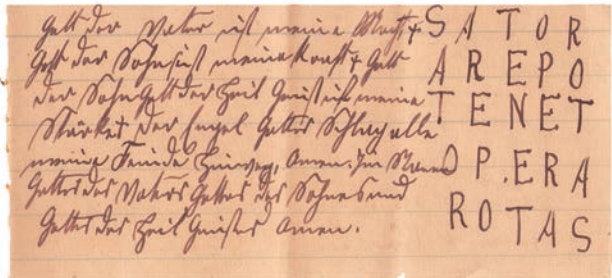
Below: Drei-Könige-Segen (Three Kings Blessing) 18th Century, Johann Hendl, Urfahr, Linz, Austria. Heilmann Collection.

Copper engraving embellished with fabric and paper, depicting the Three Kings Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar standing under the star of Bethlehem. The inscription reads "O Blessed Star, cast thy light upon this house." The Three Kings appear extensively in both officially sanctioned and folk religious blessings throughout Europe and Pennsylvania.

Below: Ein Sehr Kräftiges Gebet (A Very Powerful Prayer) ca. 1880, Ulrich & Gehring, Kutztown Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University - Don Yoder Collection.

A rare Kutztown broadside blessing, attributed to the Three Kings and the cathedral dedicated to them in Cologne, Germany. The concluding words in the central column ask for assurance both now and in eternity, echoing the last lines of the Roman Catholic Hail Mary, "...nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae" - "Now and in the hour of our death."





Above right: The contents of an 18th-century European letter of blessing (*Breverl*) which was sealed and worn on one's person. Above left: A scapular worn around the shoulders with images of the saints, as well as an unopened *Breverl*, highly embellished with the beaded monogram of the Virgin Mary. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

Left: Personal blessings for healing and protection, made by Dr. Joseph H. Hageman of Reading, Berks County. In 1911, the *New York Times* called him "the greatest powwow doctor who ever lived." Hageman's blessings were derived from a European book of blessings called *Der Geistliche Schild und Heiliger Segen*.

Blessing for Estella May Boyer, 1895 [Reading, Pennsylvania] Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.



Early Protective Blessing, 18th century – Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. Personal protective blessing produced in black and red ink on the verso of an unidentified, 18th-century Philadelphia printed estate document. Features a winged angel with a burning heart and crown, associated with the mystical vision of the Sophia or feminine aspect of the Holy Spirit, popular among certain Pietist groups in early Pennsylvania. The angel oversees the six days of creation, depicted within the Star of David, with planetary symbols within each point and the sun in the center. However, Mars is missing, and replaced by a “J” - possibly an intentional inversion of martial influence as a protection from violence. The inscription I.N.R.I. (Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum - Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) is a common protective inscription, flanked above and below with three crosses, symbolic of the Holy Trinity. *Adonai*, a Hebrew name for God meaning Lord, is inscribed on the left. Creases indicate it was folded and carried on the person.

parishioners. Non-ordinary experiences with spirits and the supernatural, illnesses believed to be caused by grudges or sin, even the possibility that calamity could be caused intentionally by the envy of malicious people – all of these experiences and perceptions no longer fit the Protestant climate, yet were never successfully expunged from the worldview of the people. Rituals and prayers for healing, protection, and assistance served to mitigate these concerns and integrate such narratives into a coherent and meaningful undercurrent that has served the needs of Pennsylvanians for centuries.

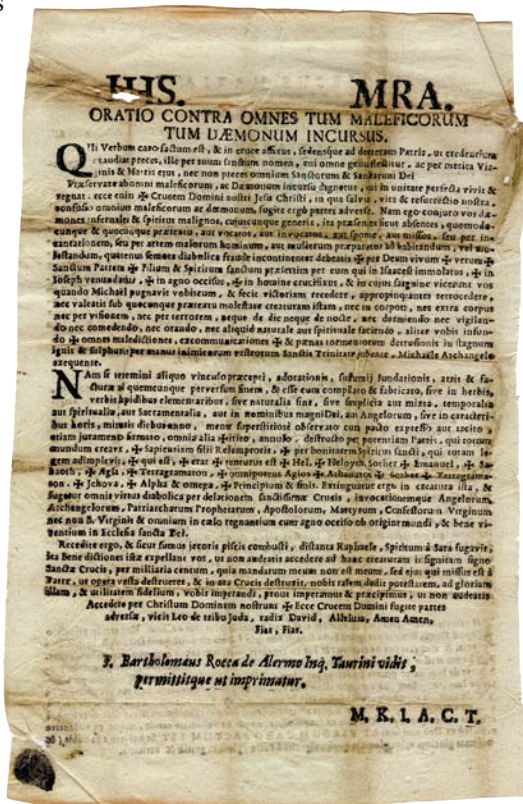
Although the original aim of the Reformation was to fundamentally challenge the authoritative structures of Rome that mediated humanity's connection to the divine, the resulting Protestant discourse, as both a spiritual and an intellectual movement, became increasingly centered on the use of reason and rationalism to debate rival factions, revise the tenets of faith, and expunge those elements of Roman Catholicism that had accumulated in the medieval era and were based in tradition, rather than biblical literature.<sup>43</sup> Aside from the primary doctrinal debates concerning the nature of salvation and concerns about abuses of power, to the Protestant movement all aspects of religious experience were suddenly under scrutiny for evidence of perceived contamination from papal authority, even symbolism, iconography, and especially the role of the saints.

While the traditional Roman Catholic veneration of the saints was attacked for its extra-biblical and legendary facets, Dr. Martin Luther warned against wholesale iconoclasm in regard to the

saints, advocating that those saints who were biblical in nature should be maintained for their inspirational and didactic role as models of a Christian life.<sup>44</sup> Despite this concession, there were serious consequences of this new theology. To undermine the traditional reverence for the saints was to potentially initiate the unraveling of an entire worldview in which the supernal hierarchy of heavenly beings had the power to touch and change the lives of humans. This is not to say that Protestants dismissed a relationship with the divine, or even the angels, but holy agents with human faces were replaced with a much more remote, abstract, and cerebral conception of the divine. This transition was only partially successful.

In addition to the scriptural arguments against non-biblical saints, Protestant leaders were also distinctly aware that the destruction of the cult of the saints would dismantle the power structures that had evolved around the tombs, shrines, and relics of the martyrs and disrupt this expression of popular piety throughout Europe, as well as redefine the very nature of the sacred that originated in Roman Christianity. It was not only the folk culture that struggled with these changes; it was the very leadership of the Holy Roman Empire.

Even the Elector of Saxony, Frederick III, The Wise, who protected Martin Luther while he penned his revolutionary vernacular translation of the Bible, was intimately connected to the cult of the saints and the power that it represented. It was well known that by the time that Luther released his German New Testament in 1522, Frederick owned over 19,000 holy relics of Christ and the saints,



*Latin Prayer against Witches and Demonic Attacks, 17th century, European. Heilmann Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. A rare, late 17th-century Roman Catholic protective document attributed to Fr. Bartholomaeus Rocca Palermo Inq[uisitor] of Turin. The broadsheet is printed on both sides with blessings attributed to St. Vincent, invocations of the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew highest names of God, and passages from the Gospel of John on the verso. The document was folded, sealed with wax, as well as a square metal cover.*

including one thumb of St. Anne, straw from Christ's holy manger, a twig from the burning bush of Moses, and even a vial of milk from the Virgin Mary!<sup>45</sup>

Frederick's relics were housed in the All Saints Cathedral in Wittenberg, where they were displayed each year on the second Sunday after Easter between 1503 and 1523, and vast sums of money were culled from pilgrims and nobles alike, who were granted indulgences for public veneration of the relics. These indulgences were part of an elaborate system designed to provide exemption in the afterlife from time spent in Purgatory prior to entry into Heaven. Ironically Frederick III put an end to his collecting following the 1517 controversy of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences, and following Frederick's death less than a decade later, the relics were dispersed and destroyed in the wake of the iconoclastic fervor that swept across the German territories.<sup>46</sup>

But while overt display of images of the saints became forbidden in Protestant lands, poetic, prayerful invocations of the saints remained written in the hearts and minds of Protestant people, who eventually made their way to the New World.

#### MARTIN LUTHER & RITUAL AMONG THE PROTESTANT CLERGY

As the central figure in the Reformation, Luther is often assumed to have been the living embodiment of Protestant doctrine and therefore to have been the primary proponent of the rational theology that so characterized the shift from the Roman Catholic consensus of his era. While the theology of Lutheranism certainly bears the mark of its originator, Luther himself held a much more complex view of the relation of humanity to the divine than is often reflected in the Augsburg Confession. As a mystic, Luther's world view shaped some of the very attitudes that would later come under criticism in Protestant theology.<sup>47</sup> Discussions of spirits and the supernatural causes of natural phenomena were some of the highlights of Luther's *Table Talks*, a publication of informal discussions held between Luther and his closer friends and colleagues.<sup>48</sup> While these documents were never intended as the basis for church doctrine, they are revealing of the attitudes and beliefs commonly held in Luther's time.

Luther was unshakably certain, for instance,

that the devil and his demonic servants were active agents of destruction in the world, causing calamity, storms, and illnesses - and he considered himself to be a primary target. Not only did he believe that his physical illnesses were the result of continual spiritual struggles with the forces of darkness, he also asserted that doctors were of no avail in such circumstances. Luther also reinforced the old Roman Catholic notion that illness could be the direct result of sin. Although Luther admitted that scientific medicine and the aid of devout physicians were gifts from God, he maintained that clergy were more effective as healers of spiritual illness.

On the other hand, Luther also spoke of folk cures, and expounded the belief that three toads when skewered and left to dry in the sun can draw the poison out of tumors. Luther even described certain remedies that are effective only when applied by nobles, such as holy water applied by the Elector of Saxony, Frederick III. Luther also believed strongly that religiously-rebellious humans could harm their neighbors through malicious ritual means. He describes certain people (usually women) who could by infernal powers cause milk, butter, and eggs to spoil so that such food would drop to the floor when one tried to eat it, and that anyone who chastised such people for their deeds would fall victim to the plagues of the devil. Luther described that even his own mother struggled with a neighbor who was known to curse infants so that they would cry themselves to death, and cursed a clergyman with a deadly illness that no remedy could cure using the dust from his footprints. When asked about the proper recourse for such behavior, Luther cited scripture, and reminded his colleagues that in the Old Law, the priests cast the first stone at such malefactors.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to maintain Luther's words within the proper context, and not to elevate these informally documented sessions with the reformer as articles of faith. At the same time it is also significant to note the extent to which these attitudes can also be reflected in later generations of clergy in Europe and the New World, and the way in which pastoral care included an awareness of the spiritual and physical experience of suffering. Ministry needed to answer these concerns if it were to be effective in communities where such beliefs are held in common. In some cases, Pennsylvania clergy not only answered

such concerns with official forms of pastoral care, but also occasionally participated directly in powwow practices.

The esteemed Lutheran circuit-rider Rev. Georg P. Mennig (1773-1851) served and assisted in founding congregations over the Blue Mountain in Schuylkill County – but he also ministered to his community as a powwow practitioner.<sup>50</sup> This celebrated and prolific pastor, whose tombstone boasts that “he preached 1633 sermons, confirmed 1733 and baptized 1631 people” also commissioned the printing of broadsides of powwow ritual procedures, most notably a cure for “wildfire” or erysipelas.

Erysipelas is an acute bacterial infection of the skin characterized by extreme inflammation and swelling that would rapidly spread, earning it the dialect names *Rotlaafe* – literally “the running redness,” or *Wildfeuer*. Prior to the use of antibiotics, erysipelas is estimated to have claimed over one-third of those who contracted it,<sup>51</sup> and conventional physicians often struggled to provide relief.

Mennig’s procedure made use of a red string to remove the illness and was widely practiced throughout the Dutch Country. His cure called out to the illness animistically, and asked it to depart: *Wild Feuer, flieh, flieh, flieh. Der rothe Faden jagt dich hie!* (Wildfire, flee, flee, flee. The red string chases you away!).

Mennig’s instructions continue that one must pass the string three times over the afflicted person, and each time say the indicated words. Thereafter, one must tuck the string into a piece of paper, and hide it in the chimney, where the string would be smoked by a fire. After three hours, one should take the string again and perform the procedure a second time, then

place the string back into the chimney. After another three hours, the process is to be repeated once more, and then the string is cast up into the chimney. The illness will depart when the string falls where it will. The instructions conclude with a *nota bene*, that if the wildfire has afflicted the body, the arms, and the legs, that one must pass the string three times over each limb, the legs, the back and the front of the person, and say the words each time.

This remedy proceeds from an ancient idea

that like attracts like, and that a red string, representing fire, could be used to attract and remove the fiery skin infection. Likewise the smoke from the chimney would carry away the illness as it is extinguished. Furthermore, the ritual is framed as an animistic dialog between the practitioner and the disease, indicating that the infection was ultimately believed to be caused by an invasive spirit, a folk belief that foreshadows the later discovery of biological pathogens. This personification of the illness as a malicious, willful entity, or as a whole cohort of entities, is found throughout Pennsylvania Dutch powwow prayers. One particularly elaborate Pennsylvania document



A typographical reproduction of of Rev. Mennig’s Cure, based on the Roughwood Collection, by the PA German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University.

from 1892-93, decorated with stars and inscribed to a Lillie A. Moyer by an unnamed “friend,” describes another cure for wildfire:

For the Wildfire to Powwow:

Wildfire and inflammation, curse and pain, running blood and gangrene, I circle thee. The Lord God protect thee. God is the highest one that can cast thee out - wildfire, inflammation, curse and pain, running blood and gangrene - and direct all harm, away from [insert baptismal name]. + + +



Aunt Sophia Bailer of Tremont, Pennsylvania, "Saint of the Coal Regions" (1870-1954), performing Georg Mennig's cure for wildfire over a woodstove with a red woolen string.

Photograph ca. 1950, Don Yoder Collection, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.



Scripted as an exorcism, these prayers command the illnesses to depart by the authority of a higher source of power. Yet unlike Lillie Moyer's powwow ritual that invokes not only the diseases but also the hosts of heaven to expel them, by comparison, the procedure endorsed by Rev. Mennig is decidedly devoid of specific Christian references. Even the tell-tale abbreviation of three crosses that typically concludes most written or printed powwow prayers is nowhere to be found on Mennig's broadside.

The typical defense for this absence of explicit Christian imagery in certain examples of powwow praxis is that an invocation of the Holy Trinity typically concludes each ritual. Beyond this, the expectation is that such rituals function as part of a broader network of sacred relationships, and that the practitioner who performs the ritual serves only as a facilitator or intermediary. This notion is echoed in one of the most celebrated of all powwow manuals, attributing the following words to St. Albert the Great: "...*aber nicht durch mich, sondern durch Gott Vater, Gott Sohn und Gott heiligen Geist...*" – "but not through me, rather through God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."<sup>52</sup>

Both Lillie Moyer's and Rev. Mennig's processes, which incorporate animistic and symbolic elements, are reminiscent of the exorcism rituals of the Middle Ages that were carried out by clergy and the laity. The exorcism rituals outlined in the infamous anti-witchcraft treatise *Maleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of the Witches*) of 1487, written by Catholic inquisitors Kramer and Sprenger and sanctioned by Pope Innocent VIII, offers the following adjuration: "...by God who redeemed thee with His Precious Blood, that thou mayest be exorcised, that the illusions and wickedness of the devil's deceits may depart and flee from thee together with every unclean spirit, adjured by him who will judge the quick and the dead, and who will purge the earth with fire. Amen."<sup>53</sup>

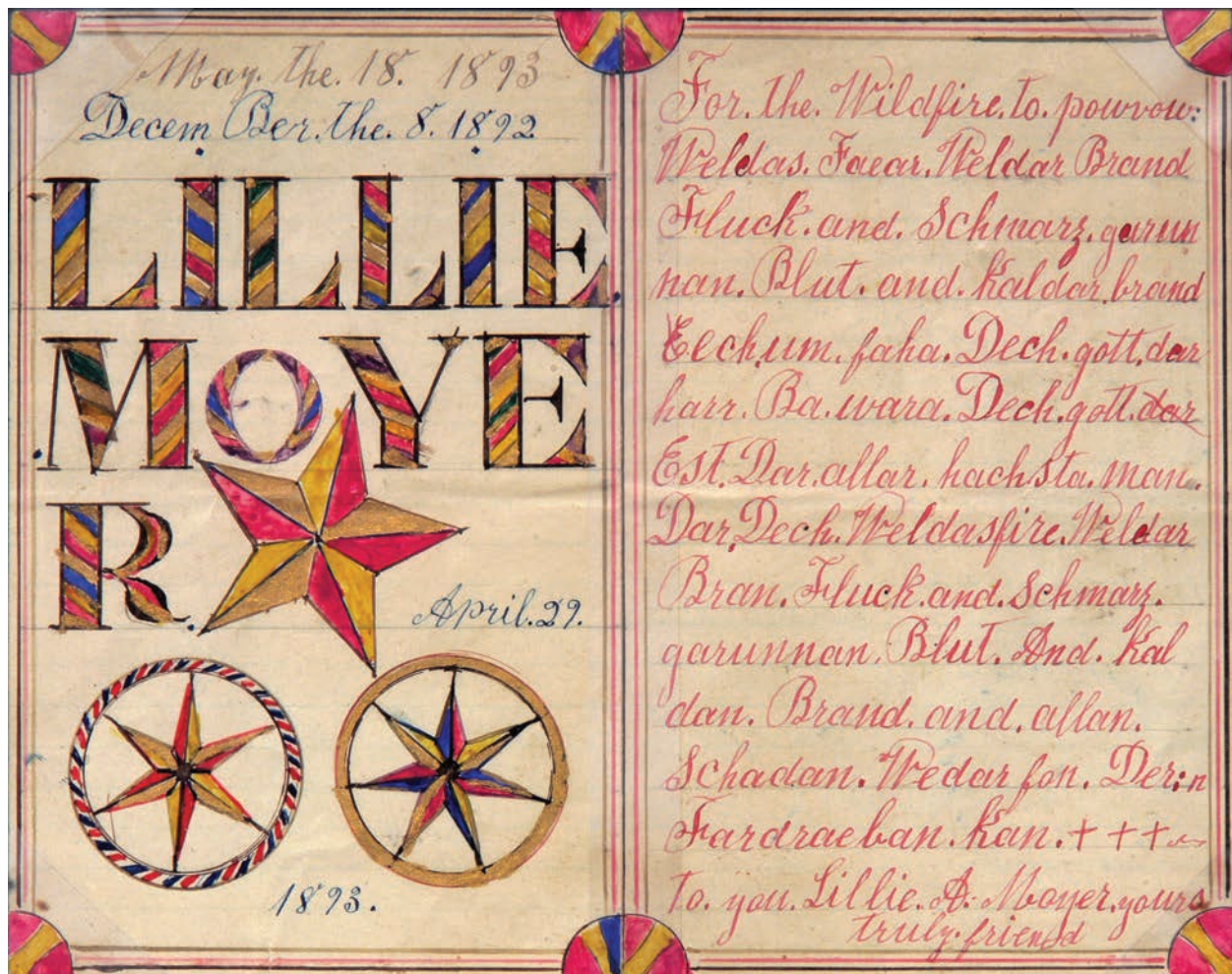
These highly elaborate exorcism rituals are not limited to Roman Catholicism, and were also once part of Protestantism. Dr. Martin Luther's first vernacular translation of the Baptismal Rite of 1523 incorporates such elements as exorcizing evil spirits from an infant by blowing under the eyes three times, anointing the ears and nose with the minister's spittle, and the use of salt (which was actually put into the child's mouth), along with more formally accepted

elements such as anointing with oil, and making the sign of the cross. During the period of adjustment in the development of early Protestantism, elements like these were eventually removed from the liturgy.<sup>54</sup> Each of these procedures appears in Pennsylvania Dutch folk practice: blowing is used to remove fire from a burn, and salt is a substance commonly believed to neutralize misfortune and repel evil. Both saliva and oil were historically part of powwow practice and were applied in the healing of certain childhood ailments, such as colic. Ubiquitously, the sign of the cross is used as a central feature in most powwow healing rituals to bless parts of the body that are afflicted.

Essentially, powwow doctors ministered to the sick using practices that were borrowed from liturgical tradition. It should therefore be no surprise that some pastors participated in the tradition and that any form of sanctioning from the clergy would be valued by the laity. In fact, the names and reputations of ministers are generously interwoven through powwow narratives, with representatives in many denominations.

The Lutheran Rev. Mennig's powwow practice is mirrored by the Brethren minister Henry Schuler Long of Franconia, Montgomery County, who was known to have carried written powwow prayers in the same notebook from which he preached his sermons.<sup>55</sup> The same is purported to have been true of the German Reformed minister Charles Gebler Herrmann of Maxatawny Township, Berks County, who compiled one of the most famous collections of German grave-side songs, *Sänger am Grabe* in 1842.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, his colleague William A. Helffrich from the same township was known to have openly discouraged his parishioners from visiting powwow doctors.<sup>57</sup>

Of all historical ministers who opposed the practice of powwow, there was none so outspoken as the Rev. William B. Raber of the Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren in Christ. His famous 1855 treatise *The Devil and Some of His Doings* describes Raber's perception of the infernal illusions that deceived American society in his day, and includes a section on "Charms and Pawwawing." Raber condemns powwowing as being the work of the devil, even though he acknowledges that it is based on religious principles. Instead he says that it "belongs to paganism, from whence it came, and it is unworthy of



Powwow instructions of Lillie A. Moyer for treating wildfire, Tulpehocken, Berks County, 1893.  
Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer; formerly of the Lester P. Breninger Collection.

an enlightened, leaving out of the question, a Christian community.” Rev. Raber continues in a judicious tone:

To cure by words and manipulations would be performing a miracle, and where would that supernatural power come from? The answer from every paw-waver is, without conscience or comment – from the Lord. Well, let us see. The sixth verse of the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel is used to stop bleeding, [When I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood live, yea, when thou wast in thy blood live] by inserting the first name of the bleeding person before the word live. Now in that verse is a similitude of Jerusalem under a neglected, wretched infant. Apply that to an individual with a bleeding nose, or otherwise, and Holy Writ is violently wrestled

out of its original meaning, by which a miracle is to be performed. Will God do such a thing? Is it in accordance with his character as God, or commensurate with the truthful nature of his attributes? My dear reader! Such things are not from God. He cannot agreeably with his veracity as God, bless a wrong application of his Holy Word to perform a miracle.<sup>58</sup>

Rev. Raber’s position is not so much a criticism of the use of scripture for healing, but the manner in which it is applied, and the aesthetics that create the ritual structure of powwow practice. This very criticism however, focuses on an excellent example of the adaptability of scriptural comparison for the purpose of healing, despite the reverend’s disagreement. The symbolic comparison of the city of Jerusalem to an

abandoned, suffering infant “polluted” in its own blood that is described in the Book of Ezekiel, is used in powwowing to create yet another comparison, in this case of the bleeding person, who is often referred to as a “child of God,” in powwow prayers. This comparison is not meant to undermine the authority of scripture, but to apply it in a meaningful way to alleviate suffering and properly place the healing experience within a religious context.

Although Rev. Raber suspects that such an application of words is evidence of paganism and a corruption of biblical interpretation, on the contrary, this particular use of scripture is often pointed to as one of the simplest examples of biblically-based ritual healing among the Pennsylvania Dutch. This particular verse of scripture was printed as a popular powwow broadside, and is sometimes found written out longhand among family papers, or marked in the margins of folio Bibles.<sup>59</sup>

Still other critics of powwow take a different perspective. Dr. J. H. Myers wrote for the *American Lutheran* in 1870, calling powwow “superstition” – except that he differentiates what he calls the “undeniable” healing resulting from the actual words that are used. Dr. Myers claimed that the healing is actually achieved through the laying on of hands, and that the words were only a veneer that shrouded an otherwise sound, Christian healing practice.<sup>60</sup>

In each case, both Rev. Raber and Dr. Myers represent official denominational doctrines, and they judge the practice of powwow based upon its divergence from their own religious expression, using similarity as their basis for determining its degree of correctness. Beyond this, both ministers redefine powwow according to their own religious schematics and relegate the tradition to categories that fail to accurately describe it. In order to emphasize the degree of incorrectness that both ministers assume, they alternately portray powwow as either a devil-induced delusion or as an ignorant superstition. While the latter term is markedly less harsh, superstition is still a prejudiced term, implying beliefs worthy of denigration. Often the term is used to denote beliefs held by others, and is rarely self-reflective. While these forms of criticism are perhaps to be expected, such attitudes ignore the place of powwow practice as part of a continuum of religious belief.

## RITUAL LITERATURE OF PENNSYLVANIA

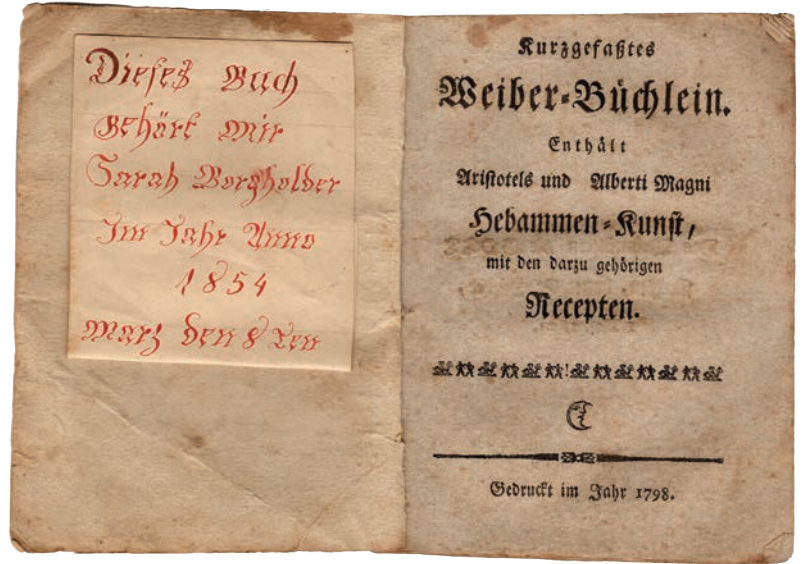
Despite the fact that powwowing is mostly informed by oral tradition, a wide range of literature has accumulated on the subject in Pennsylvania, and much of this material derives directly from European sources. The most widely circulated book on both sides of the Atlantic is attributed to the Swabian bishop, St. Albert the Great, entitled *Albertus Magnus bewährte und approbirte sympathetische und natürliche Aegyptische Geheimnisse für Menschen und Vieh* (*Albertus Magnus' Tried and Approved Sympathetic and Natural Egyptian Secrets for Man and Beast*), which provides remedies and rituals for the purpose of healing, as well as a lengthy introduction pertaining to the use of ritual to counteract the works of the devil and his servants.

One of the most celebrated and widely used blessings against malicious curses is attributed to St. Albert the Great (translated from the original German):

If a human or animal is plagued with evil spirits, how to restore him and make him whole: Thou arch-sorcerer spirit, thou hast assailed N.N., so withdraw away from her, back into thy marrow, and into thy bone, so it was spoken to thee, I dismiss thee, by the five wounds of Jesus, thou evil spirit, and I dismiss thee, by the five wounds of Jesus, thou evil spirit, and I dismiss thee by the five wounds of Jesus from this flesh, marrow and bone, I dismiss thee, by the 5 wounds of Jesus at this very hour, let N.N. become well again, in the name of God the Father, of God the Son, and of God the Holy Ghost, Amen.<sup>61</sup>

(N.N. implies that one should insert the name of an unknown person, and is a Latin abbreviation for *nomen nescio*, literally “I do not know the name.”)<sup>62</sup>

It is highly unlikely that this work was actually written by St. Albert the Great, who was distinguished for his philosophical and academic contributions to Europe as a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, a whole body of pseudo-epigraphical folk-medical literature developed around this influential saint, such as *Secretis Muleorum* (*Women's Secrets*), a popular work of midwifery, and his alleged collected works *The Book of Secrets* describing the virtues of herbs, minerals, and animals for ritual purposes. Some of the earliest manuals of powwowing practice in Pennsylvania were also works of midwifery attributed to the saint, such as *Kurzgefasstes Weiber-Büchlein. Enthael Aristoteli und*



Left: Portrait of St. Albert the Great, alleged author of several works of medicine, midwifery, and magic. Heilman Collection of Patrick J Donmoyer. Right: *Kurzgefaßtes Weiber-Büchlein*. Enthält Aristotels und Alberti Magni Hebammen Kunst (Concise Little Book for Women, Containing the Midwifery of Aristotle and Albertus the Great), Ephrata, PA 1791. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer, formerly of the Lester P. Breininger Collection.

*A. Magni Hebammen-Kunst* (Concise Women's Booklet, Containing the Midwifery of Aristotle and Albertus Magnus), printed in the 1790s by the brotherhood at the Ephrata Cloister.

The earliest known work of powwow ritual procedures produced in Pennsylvania is the 1775 manuscript of Johann Georg Henninger (1737-1815). Henninger was an Alsatian emigrant and the son of a weaver Johan Martin and his wife Anna Catharina (Fuchs) Henninger, born on April 13, 1737, in the small town of Hatten, just a mere ten miles west of the Rhine River. In 1763 he crossed the Atlantic aboard the ship *Chance*, and made his way to Albany Township, Berks County, where it is likely that he penned his manuscript.<sup>63</sup>

Henninger's work consists of two parts: The first is a series of lengthy transcriptions from a European medical booklet, *Kurtzgefasstes Arzney Büchlein für Menschen und Vieh* (Little Book of Medicine for Man and Beast), first printed in Vienna and later reprinted at the Ephrata Cloister in 1791. Henninger's manuscript was produced prior to this American publication and contains chapters for horses, cows, pigs, and humans, with copious additions not found in the Ephrata imprint. Henninger's second part is the most significant, consisting of rare, previously unpublished

blessings used for stopping blood and convulsions, healing burns, protection from calamity and criminal violence, and compelling thieves to return stolen property. He also includes inscriptions to be carried on one's person to avoid false accusations, prayers for invisibility in times of danger, and instructions for creating a ceremonial knife marked with nine crosses used in rituals for protection.

One of the simplest entries in Henninger's manuscript consists of a classic three-fold poetic blessing to stop bleeding:

*Blut-Stellung:*

*Es stehen 3 rothe Rosen am Himmel*

*Die eine ist gut, die ander stellt's Blut, die dritte heilt's gut. 3. H. N.*

[A cure for bleeding:

In heaven stand three roses red,

The first is good, the second stops the blood, the third heals it good. In the Three Highest Names.]

Henninger's trinitarian blessing employs a formulaic, non-scriptural religious statement, whereby earthly troubles are overcome by heavenly, celestial forces, and it concludes with an invocation of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. A unique blessing "for invisibility" is also included in Henninger's text. This religious blessing was not intended for mischief, as one could easily assume, but instead it was a

protective measure, so that anyone wishing him harm would be unable to see him to do harm:

*Heut tritt ich über diese Schwell,  
Christus Jesus mein Gesell,  
Die Erd mein Schu,  
Die Himmel mein Huth,  
Die heilige Engel mein Schwerd,  
Der mich heut siehst, ist mir Lieb und Werth,  
Sondern meine Feind müssen Verblenden,  
Daß sie mich an keinen Orten noch finden,  
Daß gebe mir Gott und liebe Frau  
Woran daß ich greifen, dem muss ich gleichen.  
15 Vater Unser, 5 Glauben, 3 Mahl.*

[Today I step over the threshold, Christ is my comrade,  
The earth is my shoes, and the heavens are my hat,  
The holy angel is my sword.  
Only those who love and value me will see me today,  
Otherwise my enemies must be blind, that in no place  
shall they see or find me,  
This be granted to me by God and Our Dear Lady,  
that whosoever I engage, I shall match them. 15 Our  
Fathers, 5 Creeds, 3 times. ]

A careful reading of the original German renders a poetic series of metered, rhyming couplets, and the blessing concludes with four lines of cross-rhyme. The rhyming serves both poetic and utilitarian functions because it allowed for ease of memorization. This mnemonic function is found in a wide range of religious prayers intended for recitation from memory in both official and folk-religious settings. It is notable that Henninger's blessing concludes with instructions that are also part of the rhyming scheme, including fifteen recitations of the Lord's Prayer and five of the Apostles' Creed, repeated in three rounds. While Henninger himself was a Lutheran and attended church in Grimsville, Berks County, his material clearly derives from a well-established oral tradition that predates the Reformation and retains the marks of its Roman Catholic origins.

In contrast, Henninger also included a blessing against criminal violence that includes the opening line from Luther's classic Protestant hymn, "*Ein' Feste Berg ist Unser Gott*" [A Mighty Fortress is Our God]. In this application, the "mighty fortress" is invoked as a protective shield to counteract physical and spiritual harm. This echoes other uses of Protestant hymnody for ritual purposes, such as the classic song "*Herr Jesu dir leb ich, Herr Jesu dir sterb ich, Herr Jesu dein bin ich todt un lebendig...*" (Lord Jesus, I live to thee, Lord Jesus I die to thee, Lord Jesus, I am thine, in death

and in life...), which was incorporated into blessings to safeguard one against danger.

Manuscripts like Henninger's text, ranging from notations on slips of paper to lengthy collections of ritual procedures, can present significant challenges for those who find them amongst family papers, ledgers, or tucked into Bibles. The majority of these writings were not produced for posterity, but instead for private reference. Unless these powwow documents are used or found within a family, provenance can be difficult to establish without details such as dates, names or locations. Furthermore, even if such information is available, the majority of these texts were not written in English, and instead were penned in non-standardized forms of early German. Even for those who are well-versed in modern Standard German, the task of translating these documents can be extremely difficult as there is substantial variability in early language for spelling, vocabulary, and grammar.

Only rarely are powwow materials written in Pennsylvania Dutch, even though the dialect tends to be the most common means of learning to powwow. Occasionally memorized portions of the oral tradition were written down by speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch who could not read Standard German, or even sometimes by those who only spoke English, resulting in phonetic renditions of powwow prayers. This was especially true around the turn of the 20th century, coinciding with the gradual decline of literacy in Standard German following the American Civil War, and the disappearance of German-medium schools in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Dutch had been primarily a spoken language, and has only become a written means of communication since the late 19th century. For much of the history of the Pennsylvania Dutch community, Standard German was the official written language, taught in schools, and used in church for hymns, catechism, and sermons, as well as for legal documents such as deeds and wills, and for popular publications, such as almanacs and newspapers.

The Pennsylvania Dutch vernacular language, however, was the predominant language in everyday use in the home and in the community, and mirrors the use of oral in relation to written forms of language all over the world. Unlike standard languages, which are usually subject to explicit norms of usage, oral vernaculars such as Pennsylvania Dutch, by their very

Die D. sind dreyerley benennung.  
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Georg Henning  
Meyser und Hof  
Joseph Georg Henning  
A. N. K. Domini 1775.

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Arzneij Büchlein für Menschen und Vieh, Gehört Georg Henning, ANNO Domini 1775 (Little Book of Medicine for Man and Beast, Belonging to George Henning, in the Year of Our Lord 1775). Albany Township, Berks County. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

nature, are subject to greater variation and change over time. Ironically, it is commonly presumed that dialects (regionally defined vernacular languages) develop as a deviation or departure of standard language, but the opposite is true. Dialects predate their standard official counterparts. Pennsylvania Dutch is descended from the Rhenish-Franconian German dialects historically spoken in western central Germany. Modern Standard German is most closely related to written varieties in use in 15th- and 16th-century Saxony, in the eastern region of central Germany. Yiddish, which also has its origins in Rhenish-Franconian German, is a close linguistic cousin to Pennsylvania Dutch.

Just like manuscript powwow materials, the earliest books and broadsides featuring instructions for powwow rituals were printed in Standard German, and like the works attributed to Albert the Great, many claim European origins. One of the earliest collections of broadside powwow cures was from the nom-de-plume of a European medical doctor, Dr. Georg Friedrich Helfenstein, an undisguised reference to one of the most celebrated lines of German Reformed ministers in Pennsylvania. Johann Augustus Conrad Helfenstein was the progenitor of several generations of Reformed (and a few Lutheran) clergymen, spreading from Philadelphia to Northumberland County, and even south into Frederick, Maryland<sup>65</sup> – although Georg Friedrich was likely fictional.

The Helfenstein collection, entitled *Soli Deo Gloria* (*Glory to God Alone*), consists of seventy-nine unbound broadsides and tells the story of Dr. Helfenstein, a medical doctor educated in the Netherlands, who became a practitioner of spiritual healing methods after a mysterious “gray man” appeared to him and taught him the “secrets of sympathy,” only to later vanish before his very eyes. The collection comprises three parts: the first containing religious blessings to be used in healing the sick; the second, rituals for assistance in times of need, protection from violence, stopping thieves; and the third contains blessings for animals and livestock.

The introductory broadsheet is signed “J. H. Helfenstein” and is sealed with two wax seals depicting a fox and a lion. The unbound collection is unique, as each broadside can be removed from the collection and used as a talisman or applied in healing rituals. Only about a dozen copies are known in Pennsylvania, most of which are enclosed in decorative paper or tin

boxes for safekeeping. Most of these known copies are incomplete as a result of the individual broadsides being separated from the collection for use and applied to the person for healing or protection. Leaves from my copies show evidence of having been folded and used as talismans.

Helfenstein’s work was later released in book form as an undated chapbook printed at an unknown location, entitled *Dr. Helfenstein’s vielfaeltig erprobter Hausschatz der Sympathie* (*Dr. Helfenstein’s Diverse ProvenHouse-TreasuryofSympathy*), and subsequently reprinted in 1853 by Scheffer & Beck of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in a dual edition with Johann Georg Hohman’s *Der lange Verborgene Freund*. An extremely rare English translation of the undated Helfenstein chapbook edition appeared in 1901 by Nicholas Bohr of Shamokin as *The Secrets of Sympathy*, and was issued yet again by William Beisel of Klingerstown, Schuylkill County in 1938. Circumstantial evidence would suggest that Helfenstein’s collection originates from above the Blue Mountain, perhaps at Sunbury – an early location for German-language printing.

Helfenstein’s collection is decidedly anchored in biblical verses used as cures, and his methodology draws almost exclusively upon the miraculous healings of Christ. The work begins with biblical verses from the 22nd chapter of the Gospel of Mark: “For verily I say unto thee, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; and he shall have whatsoever he saith.” Within the context of the biblical story and Helfenstein’s use of the passage, these words of Christ are not merely meant to serve as an inspirational message, but as an explanation of the subordination of all creation to the will of God, exhibited in the preceding verses when Christ cursed the fig tree in Jerusalem and it withered the following morning. The motifs of the mountain and the sea are reflected throughout Helfenstein’s work, as illnesses are invoked as spiritual entities, and commanded to depart “to the highest mountain” or “the depths of the sea.”

Helfenstein’s cure for a fever makes use of this motif, and begins with a biblical injunction, identifying the illness as an aberration from the sacred order:

*Himmel und Erde sind geschaffen, und es war alles Gut, alles was von Gott gemacht ist, daß ist Gut, nur das Fieber ist eine Plage, darum wende dich von mir, verlasse mir, entferne dir verschwinde von mir, auf hohe Berge sollst Fliehen, in der Tiefe solst ziehen, ziehe aus von mir im Namen Johannes der Heilige Apostel, und Jesus Christus, der Sohn Gottes.*

For fever, call the baptismal name of the sick person three times and say the following words: Heaven and Earth were created, and everything was good. Everything made by God is good, and only the fever is a plague. Therefore, yield from me, depart from me, remove thyself and vanish from me, fly to the highest mountains and thou shalt withdraw into the depths, withdraw from me in the name of John the Holy Apostle, and Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Helfenstein's cure for snakebite is structured in a nearly identical manner, and similarly describes the heavens and the earth as part of a created universe. This same cure appears in manuscript form from the writings of a Lebanon County woman named Regina Seltzer.

*Und Gott had alles erschafen was in Himmel und auf erden ist, und alles war gud, nicht als allein die schlange had Gott verflucht, verflucht solst du bleiben schlangen, geschwülst ich stelle dich, gift und schmerz dich döde dich, zian dein güft, zian dein güft, zian dein güft amen X X X. Regina Seltzer 1837*

And God created all things in heaven and on earth, and everything was good, except for thee, Snake, which God cursed, and cursed shalt thou remain. Swelling I halt thee, poison and pain, I destroy thee. Withdraw thy poison, withdraw thy poison, withdraw thy poison, Amen, [in the name of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit] X X X. Regina Seltzer 1837

In both cures for snakebite and fever, the opening declaration derived from the first chapter of the Book of Genesis places the afflicted person within an ordered, sacred universe. Framed within this religious axiom, the illness is identified as a symptom of the fall. This dissonance of cosmic proportion is reflected not only in the afflicted person at the time of the ritual's performance, but the whole experience takes on a larger dimension of the universal pain of a fallen humanity. The healing of the person is also therefore a restoration of sacred balance. The illness is denied its power and commanded to depart with the authority of a higher supernal reality through which all things are possible, with "XXX" representing shorthand for the Three Highest Names of the Holy

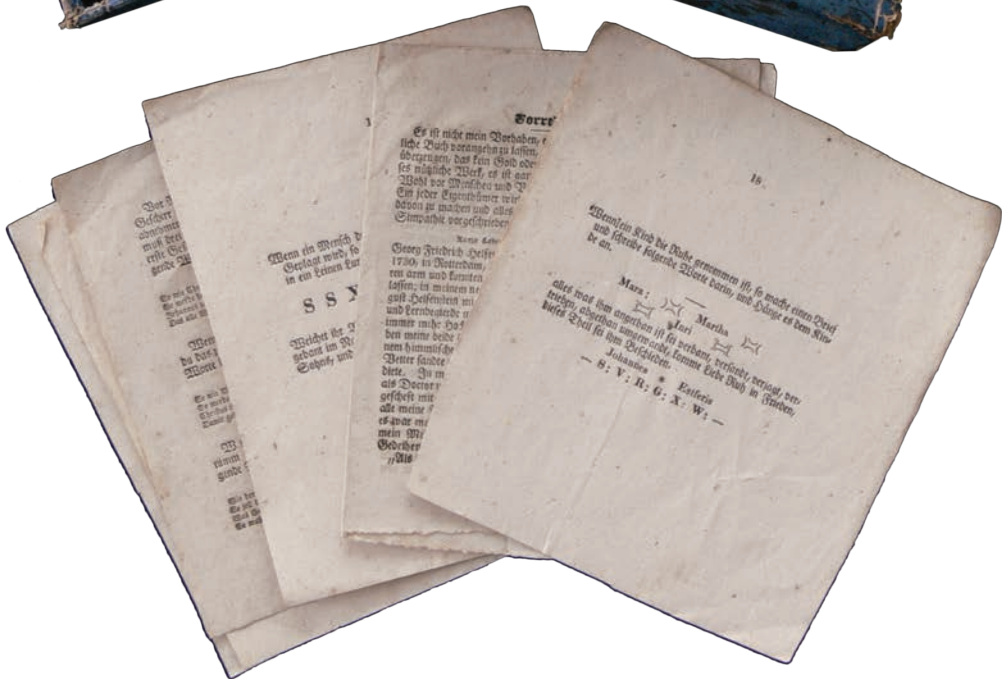
Trinity in written powwow materials.

In addition, some of these early broadsides and manuscripts can shed light on the interrelation of oral tradition, written manuscripts, and printed works. All of these sources of information tend to inform one another, with oral tradition appearing in writing and written materials serving as the basis for memorized prayers. Frequently, materials change substantially from this process of memorization and recording. For instance, a printed powwow manual from Berks County, Pennsylvania reproduces the snakebite cure found in Helfenstein. This latter citation, however, appears in a degraded form, substituting the banishing words repeated three times, "zieh an dein gift" (withdraw thy poison) for the truncated exclamation, "zing, zing, zing!"<sup>66</sup> These derivative, abbreviated forms appear at first glance to be "magical words," but are in fact the byproduct of putting into print those things which are repeated from memory, overheard, or mistranscribed.

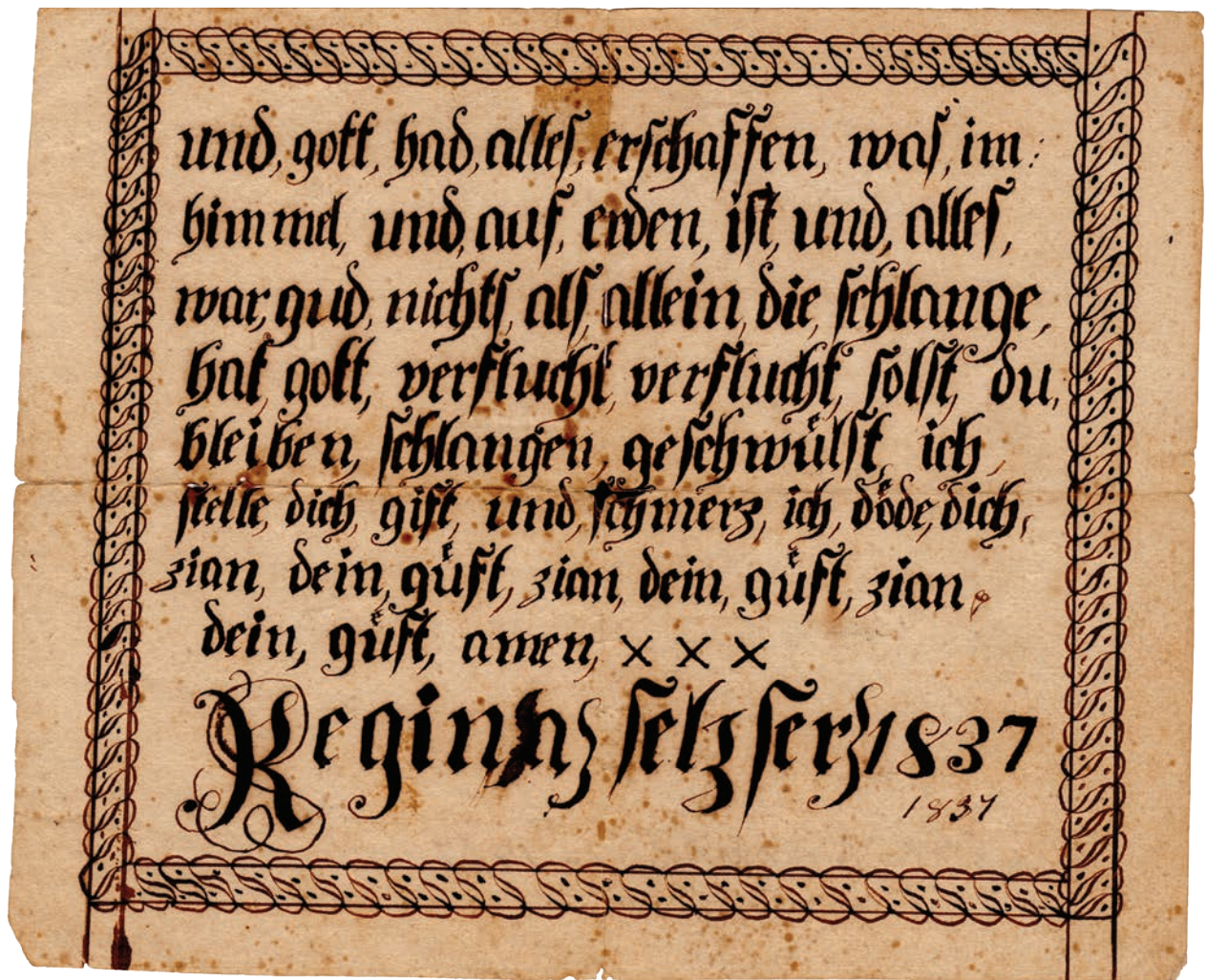
This latter example of the cure for snakebite was recorded in 1820 in the most celebrated of all powwow manuals printed in Pennsylvania, entitled *Der lange Verborgene Freund (The Long-Hidden Friend)* by Johann Georg Hohman, commonly reprinted under the English title *Long Lost Friend*.<sup>67</sup> Hohman was a Roman Catholic immigrant who arrived in Pennsylvania in 1802 as a redemptioner who worked after his arrival to reimburse the costs of his passage across the Atlantic.<sup>68</sup> Following his release from indenture, Hohman became an entrepreneurial compiler and huckster of books and broadsides, ranging from the religious to the mundane – literally everything from a Roman Catholic Catechism to a children's book about a poodle.<sup>69</sup>

One of his earliest collections of powwow materials, entitled *Der Freund in der Noth (The Friend in Need)*, was printed by Johann Ritter in 1813 and contained only twenty-four pages of blessings for healing and protection, as well as a section on the use of omens for divination.<sup>70</sup> In an advertisement in the *Reader Adler (Reading Eagle)* newspaper, Hohman introduces himself as a poor man suffering from chronic illness, who hoped to earn money from the publication.<sup>71</sup> Although this particular work is obscure and remains largely unknown, his subsequent and more popular compendium *The Long Lost Friend* has been the most widely distributed work of its kind





*Soli Deo Gloria, or The Secrets of Sympathy of Dr. Helfenstein*, ca. 1810 [Sunbury, Northumberland Co.] Heilmann Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. A rare unbound collection of broadside cures entitled *Glory to God Alone*, attributed to Dr. Georg Friedrich Helfenstein.



Snake Bite Charm of Regina Selzser, Jackson Township, Lebanon County 1837 – Heilman Collection, Formerly of the Roughwood Collection.

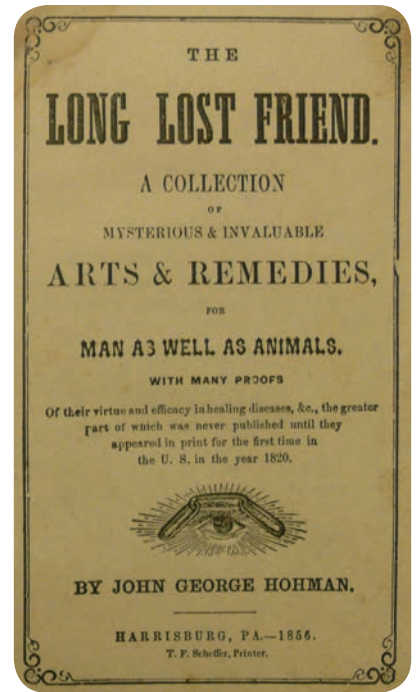
in the United States. This work has been used not only for powwow practice, but has also been a favorite of hoodoo practitioners in the south.<sup>72</sup>

*The Long Lost Friend* contains prayers and rituals for healing, protection, and assistance, as well as some miscellaneous household recipes. Hohman didn't write the contents, but merely copied the majority from a classic 18th-century European collection of cures called *das Romanus-Büchlein*, or *The Little Book of the Gypsies*,<sup>73</sup> which had appeared a decade earlier than Hohman's edition under the title *Das Vortreffliche Zigeunger Büchlein*, or *The Splendid Little Book of the Gypsies* in Reading, Pennsylvania, around 1810.<sup>74</sup> Some of the contents were also copied from

*Albertus Magnus*, but the remainder of the materials included in *The Long Lost Friend* was derived from the oral tradition, which caused a stir among his contemporaries. Hohman alludes to the controversy in his foreword:

I had not wanted to allow it to be printed, and my wife also opposed it, but my compassion for my fellow man was too great...I ask thee once again, friend, male or female, is it not at present an eternal praise for me that I have permitted such books to be printed? Do I deserve no reward from God on account of it?<sup>75</sup>

In Hohman's introduction, amongst a series of testimonials on the efficacy of ritual process dated 1812-1819, Hohman's wife Catharina is mentioned as the practitioner in the earliest instance listed of



Left to Right: *Der Freund in der Noth* (*The Friend in Need*) 1813, Reading, PA. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University. A lesser-known collection of cures and rituals, compiled by Johann Georg Hohman in 1813, printed by Johann Ritter of the *Readinger Adler*. Johann Georg Hohman's *Der lange Verborgene Freund* (*The Long Lost Friend*) 1819-1820. Reading, PA. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. *The Long Lost Friend*, Harrisburg, PA: Theodore F. Scheffer, 1856. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

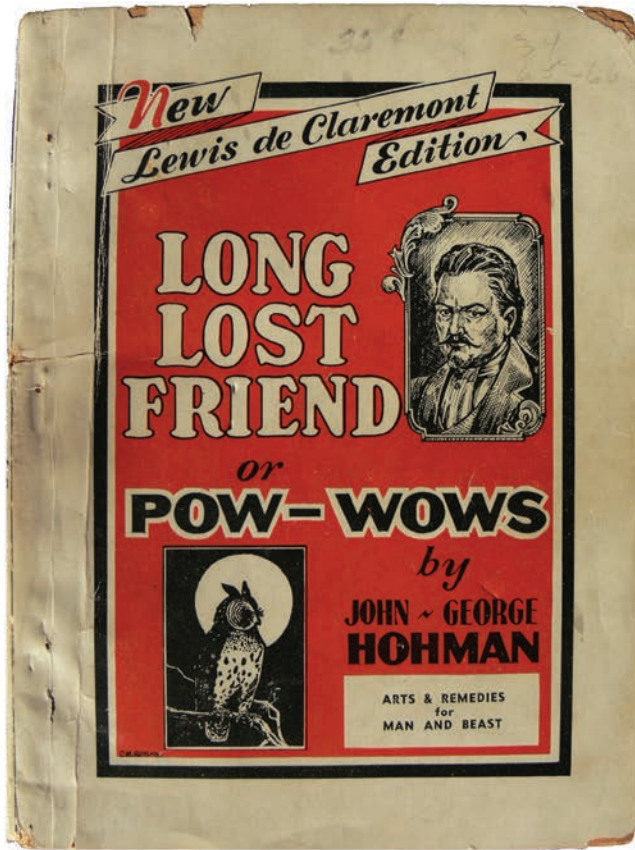
Hohman's witnessing esoteric healing.<sup>76</sup> One could therefore justifiably wonder whether or not Catharina could have been the individual responsible for teaching Hohman in the first place, adding a personal dimension to her concerns over his publication.

However altruistic Hohman's desire may have initially been to help others through the publication of sensitive ritual material, it is undeniable that Hohman's collected works, and those who have followed in his footsteps, have enabled generations of the curious to essentially bypass the traditional protocol and purchase this material without the cultural context of direct interaction with a community. Perhaps of greatest concern is the way in which this method of learning could erode the sense of gender-neutrality that has so characterized the practice. In a real sense, the literature of powwow can appear as a disembodied corpus of ritual procedures, stripped of its place within a larger system of traditional beliefs.

Some have argued positively that Hohman's works have served to perpetuate and preserve

traditional healing, which is perceived by some to be in a state of decline. While the act of recording this kind of material is certain to prevent it from being entirely forgotten, at the same time this contradictory approach to "cultural preservation," has attempted to prematurely embalm the body of ritual folk culture, long before any actual demise of the tradition has occurred. The role of Hohman's work, and other powwow manuals of a similar genre, have historically been overemphasized in the study of folk culture, when in the eyes of the folk, dependence on literature in ritual process is generally not looked upon favorably. The scholarly reliance on printed literature for folk-cultural analysis is understandable however, as it is symptomatic of the challenges inherent in the acquisition of primary sources. It is far easier for some to study a book than to establish the trust of a community.

In some cases, publications of ritual instructions have also exposed the tradition to the ridicule and sensationalism of journalists, who through scathing




Above: Lewis de Claremont's *Long Lost Friend or Pow-Wows*, a 1930s edition of John George Hohman's classic work, featuring illustrations from the comic artist Charles M. Quinlain, who also illustrated golden-age titles such as *Lone Eagle*, *Masked Rider*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Super-Sleuths*, and *Cat-man & Kitten*. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

Below: A newspaper advertisement for the Louis de Claremont edition of Hohman's *Long Lost Friend*, featured in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1939.

"I, Hohman, hereby swear and attest that whosoever shall use my secrets shall be safe from all his enemies visible and invisible and whosoever shall follow the secrets revealed in My Book and apply them should surely be able to obtain success, good fortune and prosperity."

I further say, "that whosoever shall have this book with him shall have the protection of Jesus, have no unjust sentence passed upon him, nor drowned in any water, nor burned in any fire, nor may any magic play havoc with him, so help me."  
(Excerpt from the authors statement, from the Book)



JOHN  
GEORGE  
HOHMAN



York Hex Murder Media Coverage 1929, *Philadelphia Inquirer* Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer.

Media coverage appeared on a national scale in the wake of the murder of Nelson Rehmeyer in York County, dubbed the “Hex Murder.” The murderer, John Blymire, an escapee from a mental asylum, was convinced that Rehmeyer had placed a curse upon him. In an attempt to break the “hex” by obtaining a lock of hair or Rehmeyer’s copy of John George Hohman’s *Long Lost Friend*, Blymire and two accomplices John Curry and Wilbur Hess killed Rehmeyer on the night of Thanksgiving in 1928. The trial drew national media attention to the persistence of beliefs associated with powwow in Pennsylvania; however, this media attention was heavily biased, and promoted many negative, false, and culturally insensitive stereotypes about the Pennsylvania Dutch people. The incident is often indicated as the single-most defining moment in Pennsylvania’s anti-powwow crusade, which swept across the state. Threats from lawmakers, physicians’ councils, and civic organizations forced traditional healing to be conducted in secrecy for fear of prosecution for practicing medicine without a license.

editorials have done considerable damage to the image of the culture in the public imagination of America at large.<sup>77</sup> This disembodied literature has also revealed itself as the source of much abuse and fetishization of the tradition, such as in the case of the tragic murder of Nelson Rehmeyer in York County in 1928, when an attempt to steal his copy of Hohman’s book to break the power of a curse resulted in Reymeyer’s death.<sup>78</sup> The media’s fixation on this tragic incident drew national attention to the region, and often grossly misrepresented the culture’s traditions.

One of Hohman’s major claims to fame is that his book has never been out of print in nearly 200 years. Although his original 1820 edition was printed in a typographically unassuming format, two decades later, his book was translated into English and printed by the thousands in Harrisburg by Theodore F. Scheffer. These Harrisburg editions were frequently enhanced with printing plates borrowed from the iconography of the Fraternal Order of Oddfellows, whose symbolism of three links of chain with the all-seeing-eye of Freemasonry were thought to evoke the trinitarian contents of the book.

In the 20th century, Hohman’s work was a favorite of esoteric publishing firms in Chicago such as Lewis de Claremont, Egyptian Publishing Co., and the DeLawrence Co., to name but a few. These companies specialized in a broad spectrum of popular occult works, and marketed *The Long Lost Friend* to a national audience. This was not without substantial

restructuring of the image and presentation of the tradition. In de Claremont’s late 1930s edition, Hohman is immortalized in comic-book illustrations, depicting him in nearly Dickensian attire amidst Egyptian pyramids and Turkish palaces. Instead of emphasizing the healing aspects of the tradition, advertisements for the de Claremont edition proudly boast that use of Hohman’s book would help one obtain success, good fortune, and prosperity – and worse, a description of the book’s contents promises ritual procedures that could be used to retaliate against enemies, gain advantage over others, prevent slander, manipulate the legal system, and gain invincibility.<sup>79</sup> This egomaniacal presentation of Hohman was further exaggerated by the fact that thousands of turn-of-the-century copies of the *Long Lost Friend* were printed in a dual edition with tracts against women’s right to vote (*Woman: Her Duties, Relations, and Position*, 1899)!<sup>80</sup>

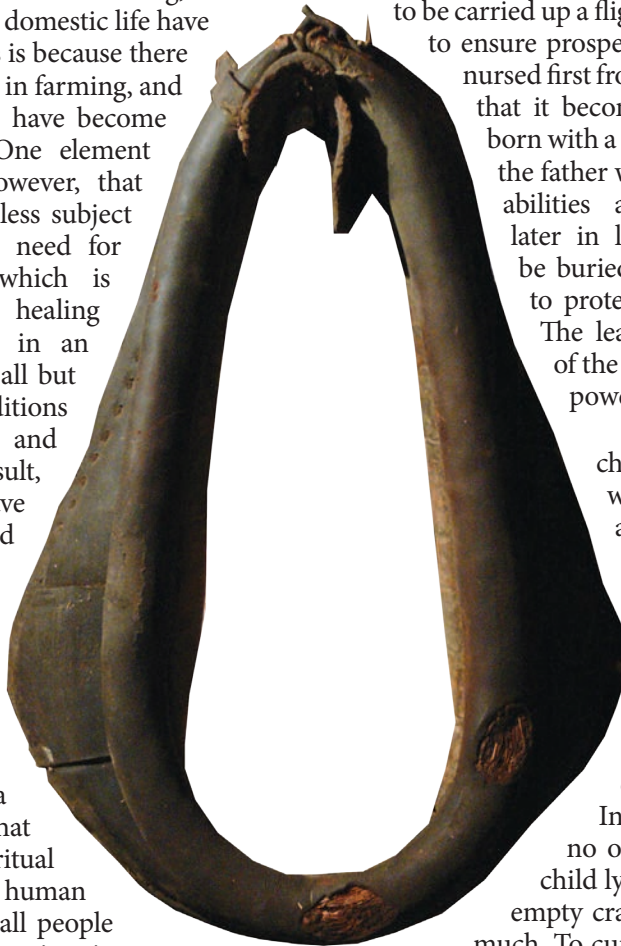
What is most obvious in these highly commercialized ventures is that the tradition was being forcibly removed from its cultural and community context of everyday life, and promoted as a self-centered practice used for personal gain. This loss of the original purpose of powwowing not only corrupts the practice and sullies its image in the public eye, but it also compromises the survival of the tradition, by undermining the integration of ritual into everyday life.

## THE RITUAL OF EVERYDAY LIFE

One need not be Pennsylvania Dutch or even from the region to appreciate the opportunities that powwow presents to consider the power of ritual to forge healthy and thoughtful connections between our beliefs and daily life. Although present-day applications of powwow have become increasingly focused on healing practices, surprisingly few of the traditions integrating ritual with farming, animal husbandry, gardening, and domestic life have survived. In one sense, this is because there has been an overall decline in farming, and our domestic transactions have become increasingly automated. One element of human experience, however, that is much more stable and less subject to change is the human need for alleviating suffering – which is another reason why the healing traditions have persisted in an ever-changing world, and all but eclipsed the ritual traditions embracing domestic and agricultural life. As a result, rituals of daily life have often been downplayed and called “superstitions” – as opposed to functional integrations of belief and life.

When confronted with the vast array of ritual behaviors recorded among the Pennsylvania Dutch, it is safe to say that on a very basic level, ritual suffused all aspects of human life.<sup>81</sup> While certainly not all people practiced each ritual expression in an overarching or comprehensive manner – by no means was this the case – nevertheless the breadth of ritual applications across the myriad functions of life demonstrates an immense potential for integration of belief into day-to-day affairs, and for such practices to follow throughout the course of one’s earthly existence.

From the very beginnings of life, rituals were



used at each step leading up to and after childbirth. Special written blessings were carried on pregnant mothers for protection and for safe delivery, and similar blessings were created for babies that were placed in cribs in order to prevent or cure illness.<sup>82</sup> A needle and thread could be used as a pendulum to divine the gender of a child still in the womb, and to predict how many children a mother would have.<sup>83</sup> When a child was born, it was once customary for it to be carried up a flight of stairs within the hour, to ensure prosperity, and a child should be nursed first from the right breast to ensure that it becomes right-handed. A child born with a caul or born posthumous of the father was believed to have greater abilities as powwow practitioners later in life.<sup>84</sup> The placenta should be buried under an elderberry tree to protect the child through life.<sup>85</sup> The leaves, blossoms and berries of the elderberry were considered powerful medicine.

Baptismal rituals in church were often blended with folk practices, such as the use of rainwater gathered on Good Friday for the baptismal ceremony. Baptismal water was thought to be particularly effective for the cure of childhood ailments, and was used to ease the pain of teething.<sup>86</sup>

In order to prevent illness, no one was to ever step over a child lying on the floor, or rock an empty cradle, or tickle the child too much. To cure colic or excessive crying, rituals that mirrored the birthing process were employed, such as passing the child through a horse collar or a blackberry bush, or around the leg of a table. Thrush was cured by drawing three lengths of straw through a child’s mouth and then depositing the straw into the outhouse, whereupon one would urinate.<sup>87</sup> The first louse found on the child’s head could be crushed on the cover of a hymnbook in order to ensure that the child would become a good

singer, or on the Bible, so that the child would be smart.<sup>88</sup> A child's first diaper should be an old one in order to make it pass its stool more easily, and the first diaper can be burned to ensure luck.<sup>89</sup>

Chores around the house were organized according to the day of the week, and rituals were woven through many aspects of cooking, baking, sewing, ironing, and cleaning. Sewing had strong ritual implications because of the use of thread or cord that had the power not only to mend fabric but to bind things together in a symbolic sense. For instance, clothes should not be mended while a person is wearing them or the person will become thought-bound or will develop enmity. Ironing was also conducted with care, for ironing the back of someone's shirt could give them backache, or make them cross. Sewing was not to be done on Ascension Day, and neither should one nail or fasten anything,<sup>90</sup> because it was believed to work against the sacred order of the day, when Christ ascended to heaven. Fishing, however, was appropriate on this day, because it agreed with the Great Commission, and was a biblical metaphor for proselytizing.

Foodways are necessarily ritual in nature, because of the repetition, timing, and precision necessary for growing crops, raising animals, storing and preserving food, and cooking. Not only were gardens and fields planted according to the relation of the moon to the signs of the zodiac, but also words and phrases could accompany the process for certain plants. It was believed that anything planted in God's name would grow.<sup>91</sup> When planting radishes from seed, one should say "So long ass mei Aarm, so dick ass mei Aarsch" (as long as my arm, and a big as my rear).<sup>92</sup> A man should plant cucumbers from seed in order that they should grow large, or plant them on the longest day of the year, or have a woman sit on the seeds after they are planted. One should begin sowing grain on a Friday and end on the following Friday, and if the task is complete beforehand, then

the seed-bag should be hung on the fence until Friday arrived.<sup>93</sup>

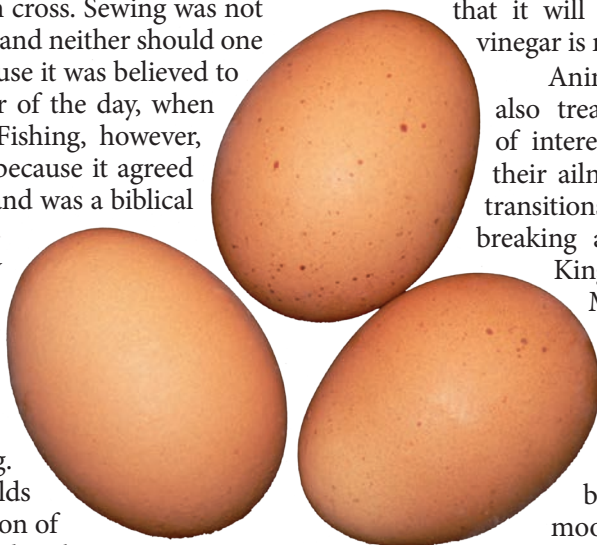
When hauling in grain, one should grease the hayforks and the axles of the wagon with lard in which Fasnachts have been fried in order that the grain will store well without weevils, and greasing the plow in the same manner will rid the fields and soil of pests that will spoil the crops.<sup>94</sup>

When starting yeast for baking, one should write the names of three capable women on a slip of paper or call their names into the mixture to ensure its activity.<sup>95</sup> The opposite is true of vinegar: one should write the names of the nastiest people one knows on a piece of paper, or take three stems from a grapevine and name them and put them in the vinegar in order that it will become strong. The best vinegar is made when one is angry.<sup>96</sup>

Animals and livestock were also treated with the same level of interest, receiving blessings for their ailments and to ease difficult transitions. An old benediction for breaking a foal invokes the Three Kings: "Caspar take thee, Melchior bind thee, and Balthasar lead thee, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>97</sup> Animals raised for their meat were typically butchered in the waxing moon, otherwise the meat would shrink and spoil.<sup>98</sup> A

method to keep chicken meat from bruising during butchering was to draw a circle intersected by a cross in *Hinkeldreck* (chicken feces) and place the chicken's neck over the cross when cutting off its head, so that the body would lie still and not run without its head.<sup>99</sup>

Processing milk and butter was one of the most sensitive of activities, and it was not uncommon to perceive that a grudge or a curse (*hex*) would cause milk to spoil or cause butter not to form.<sup>100</sup> To rid a butter churn of a curse, one could thrust a hot poker, scythe, or butcher knife into it, or shoot a silver coin



*Opposite:* Passing a child through a horse collar was once a common cure for the infant complaint known as being "livergrown" (*Aagewaxe*). Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.

*Above:* Eggs laid on Good Friday were once thought to be blessed, and were concealed in the home for protection, as well as used for the removal of illness. Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.



A concealed broom in a Berks County farm house, nailed to a floor joist visible by the basement stairs. Private Collection.

out of a gun into it.<sup>101</sup> These same notions applied to bread that wouldn't rise, or an oven that seemed to always overheat. A dishrag, stolen from a person that begrudges you, could be cut into three pieces, and stuffed into three holes bored in the mouth of the bakeoven to correct the problem.<sup>102</sup> Likewise a stolen dishcloth could cure a cow of indigestion, or if a cow is perceived to be *verhext* (bewitched), one should get up first thing in the morning without speaking to anyone, milk the cow, pour the milk into the outhouse, and relieve one's self upon it.

The household broom is perhaps one of the best examples of the perception among the Pennsylvania Dutch that the context of everyday life is what empowers an object for use in powwow rituals. According to beliefs held even by some in the present day, the household broom, when leaned against the jamb of the front door, or concealed below the threshold, has the capacity to protect the home from anyone wishing spiritual harm upon the occupants. A concealed broom of this sort was recently discovered in a Berks County farm house and was placed there by an occupant within the past few decades. While some

have assumed that this custom is related to popular associations of the broom with witchcraft, indeed the opposite is true.

The broom represented the home, and had direct contact with the dust in the home, created by everyday activities. This dust was believed to carry some measure of the essence of the house and family, which fostered a wide range of beliefs surrounding the cleaning of the home. One was not to sweep out the house after dark for fear that the home would be vulnerable to spiritual attack or misfortune.<sup>103</sup> One should not sweep on baking day (Friday), or the bread will not rise. The old broom was customarily the first item placed into a new home, as it brought with it some measure of the essence of the previous dwelling place and established a sense of domestic continuity. Married couples would step over a broom for good luck after the marriage ceremony. During feast days, such as the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, one was not to sweep out the house or barn for fear that they would sweep away the blessings that were imparted by the atmosphere during these holy times of year.<sup>104</sup>



Even outside of the sacred calendar, the dust from the home was believed to have important useful properties. It was once common to take dust from the four corners of the house and to mix a tiny bit into your coffee or into the flour used to bake bread before one embarked on a long journey in order to avoid homesickness.<sup>105</sup> The person who partook of the coffee or bread was therefore taking the home's essence into their body in order to fortify them against pining for home while away. This type of integrated belief made manifest in domestic ritual lends a whole new level of meaning to the activities of daily life, and links everyday tasks to a broader sense of cosmic order.

What is apparent from all of these examples is that each action, object, person, or circumstance is part of a broader network of relationships. Although the relations that undergird ritual process can be understood as symbolic, these beliefs are actually based in the notion known as *Sympathie* (sympathy), an ontology that interrelates all manifestations of existence by subtle, cosmic connections.<sup>106</sup> Based ultimately upon the notion of the divinely created universe, this doctrine contends that all aspects of the material and invisible worlds are connected in subtle ways, and careful observances reveal sacred patterns that can be put to use for the benefit of humanity.<sup>107</sup> Attributes and sensory qualities assist in the delineation of these affinities for both physical and immaterial entities, ranging from the stars to the soil, and everything in between – a potato, a broom, a lock of hair, a pitchfork, an egg, a coal shovel, a pig trough, or a shoe. The more subtle immaterial aspects include human emotions, thoughts, alliances, kinship – but the correspondences are rarely linear. Colors, materials, shapes, fragrances, temperatures – each property and descriptor expresses a greater significance beyond its literal meaning and suggests a bigger view of the world.

Ultimately, although many of these expressions of ritual culture do not make overt reference to religion, the underlying correspondences and relationships mirror the old sacred hierarchy of heaven and earth. By virtue of this sacred origin of the universe, the world is positively alive with meaning and capable of communicating. Ritual is the mechanism by which this worldview is both experienced and reinforced, allowing for common people to participate in the unfolding of creation.

## CONCLUSION

Pennsylvania Dutch folk culture, like many traditional societies across the globe, has demonstrated throughout the centuries a highly integrated system of belief that encompasses domestic, agricultural and spiritual life. Powwowing provides the opportunity to witness how ordinary challenges are encountered and constructively engaged within the context of meaningful relationships. Ritual forms the basis for this dialogue, transforming ordinary experience into an expression of cosmic and sacred proportions.

While concerns about the preservation of this important practice are justified, it is equally important to remember that these ritual traditions were not observed self-consciously out of a desire for preservation or idealization of the past, but as practical expressions of a community identity. It would obviously be absurd and impractical to advocate for any wholesale, present-day performance of these rituals as some form of veneration of previous stages of a culture's history – that is, without actually sharing the beliefs that shaped and integrated such traditions into a coherent way of life.

At the same time, dismissing such traditions as obsolete would also be missing a unique opportunity to more closely reflect on our dynamic American culture's diversity of spiritual expression, as well as to learn from our difficulties and grow with an awareness of our roots. Powwowing challenges us all to become more fully cognizant of the ways in which ritual is still very much an active force in the present, human endeavor to heal our existential concerns and satisfy our hunger for meaning. Although the structure and organization of our lives have changed dramatically in the past three hundred years, powwowing has survived into the present day as evidence of a vibrant spiritual tradition that continues to be a viable expression of the vast potential to discover meaning in everyday experience.

## ENDNOTES

1. Although the study of powwowing was pioneered by early 20th-century folklorists such as Edwin Miller Fogel (*Beliefs & Superstitions of the Pennsylvania Germans*, 1915), Ezra Grumbine ("Folklore and Superstitious Beliefs of Labanon County," 1905), Thomas Brendle and Claude Unger (*Folk Medicine of the Pennsylvania Germans*, 1935), it was fundamentally transformed by the founders of the American Folklore Studies movement Drs. Alfred Shoemaker and Don Yoder (see: *Discovering American Folklife*, 2015, 11; *Hohman and Romanus: The Origins and Distribution of the Pennsylvania German Powwow Manual*, 1976, & *Official Religion Versus Folk Religion*, 1965) who studied powwow as a living expression of a folk tradition. In more recent years, powwow has also been integrated into the ethnographic study of alternative and complementary medicine, in works by Barbara Reimensnyder (*Powwowing in Union County*, 1982), David J. Hufford (*Folk Medicine in Contemporary America*, 1992), Bonnie Blair O'Connor (*Healing Traditions: Alternative Medicine and the Health Profession*, 1995), and David Kriebel (*Powwowing Among the Pennsylvania Dutch: A Traditional Medical Practice in the Modern World*, 2007).
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5. For information on "Passing," also called *Benedicaria*, see: Weaver, Karol K. 2011. *Medical Caregiving and Identity in Pennsylvania's Anthracite Coal Region 1880-2000*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press; For Rootwork, see: Montgomery, Jack 2008; For Santería, see: González-Wippler, Migene. 1989. *Santería, the Religion: A Legacy of Faith, Rites, and Magic*. New York: Harmony; For Curanderismo, see: Kiev, Ari. 1968. *Curanderismo: Mexican-American Folk Psychiatry*, New York: The Free Press; For granny doctors, see: Montgomery, Jack. *ibid*; Milnes, Gerald. 2007. *Signs, Cures, & Witchery: German Appalachian Folklore*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press; For Cajun healing, see: Veillon, Berk. 1998. *Cajun Healing: Les Traiteur et Les Traiteuse*. Antonio, TX: Acclaim Publishing.
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27. This theme of exoticism is echoed in many North American titles: *The Egyptian Secrets of Albertus Magnus (Albertus Magnus'...Egyptische Geheimnisse*. 1869. Allentown, PA: Harlachter and Weiser); *The Magnificent Book of the Gypsies (Das Vortreffliche Zigeuner Büchlein*. c.1810, Reading, PA: Heinrich Sage); *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses (Das sechste und siebente Buch Mosis*. 1871. New York: Wilhelm Radde.
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30. Penance appears in Pennsylvania sources (Donmoyer 2012, *ibid*. 61), and direct references to the *Ave Maria* appear frequently in manuscript form, such as the works of Georg Henninger of Albany Township, Berks County (1775, Heilman Collection), and the Ledgers of Isaac Zwalley of Akron (1880's, Landis Valley Museum).
31. Yoder 1976, 248.
32. Brown, Peter. 1981. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
33. Yoder 2015, 199.
34. Bainton, Roland. H. 1972. *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 26-27.
35. Clebsch, William A., and Charles R. Jaekle. 1964. *Pastoral care in historical perspective: an essay with exhibits*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 174.
36. Beitzl, Klaus. 1978. *Volks Glaube: Zeugnisse Religiöser Volkskunst*. Salzburg & Wien, AT: Residenz Verlag.
37. Franz, Adolph. 1960. *Die Kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*. Band I & II. Graz, AT: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt.
38. Mother and Child *Gnadenbild* was translated by Heide Balon, Edward Quinter, and Patrick J. Donmoyer in 2016. Heide Balon is recently curating an exhibition on Protective Images and Heavenly Letters (*Schutzengelbilder und Himmelsbrief*) at the Stadt Museum Reutlingen: <[www.reutlingen.de/de/kultur+Bildung/Museen-und-Galerien/Aktuelle-Ausstellungen/Ausstellungen?view=publish&item=article&id=8864](http://www.reutlingen.de/de/kultur+Bildung/Museen-und-Galerien/Aktuelle-Ausstellungen/Ausstellungen?view=publish&item=article&id=8864)>
39. *Ein Sehr Kräftiges Gebet (A Very Powerful Prayer)* ca. 1880, Kutztown, PA: Ulrich & Gehring, Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University, Don Yoder Collection.
40. For St. Lawrence and Cyprian in published and manuscript prayers, see Yoder 2015, 202; For

- St. Blaise in prayers for menstrual disorders, see Donmoyer 2012, 99; St. George & Martin in MS. Georg Henninger, 1775, Albany Twp, Berks County.
41. "Three Holy Women" or "Three Virgins" are frequently mentioned in North American and European ritual literature and rarely identified. Hohman names them as Sts. "Elisabeth, Brigitta und Mechtildis (Matilda)" in his 1819 apocryphal work *Das Evangelium Nicodemus*, printed by C. A. Bruckman in Reading.
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43. Hoffman, Bengt R. 1976. *Luther and the Mystics*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.
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57. Helfrich, William A. 1906. *Lebensbild aus dem Pennsylvanisch-Deutschen Predigerstand: Oder Wahrheit in Licht und Schatten*. Allentown, PA: N. W. A. & W. U. Helfrich, 345
58. Raber, W. B. 1855. *The Devil and Some Of His Doings*. Canton, OH: United Brethren in Christ.
59. Several broadside Ezekiel 16:6 cures exist: one from the Roughwood Collection at the Library Company of Philadelphia, and several more in the collection of Russel D. Earnest Associates. A manuscript of the verse was also found in a Fegley family Bible from Berks County, PA (Heilman Collection). The family Bible of Dr. Joseph H. Hageman of Reading, PA (Private Collection) has a mark in the margin by the verse in Ezekiel.
60. Yoder 1965, 234-36
61. *Albertus Magnus' bewährte und approbirte sympathetische und natürliche Egyptische Geheimnisse*. Allentown: Harlacher and Weiser, 1869, 1:5.
62. Lewis, Charlton T. 1918. *An Elementary Latin Dictionary*. New York: American Book Co., 535.
63. Burgert, Annette K. 1992. *Eighteenth Century Emigrants from the Northern Alsace to America*. Camden, ME: Picton Press.
64. For the most recent and comprehensive treatment of Pennsylvania Dutch, see Loudon, Mark L. 2016. *Pennsylvania Dutch : The Story of an American Language*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
65. Miller, Daniel. 1906. *Early History of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania: By Daniel Miller. With introduction by Prof. W.J. Hinke, D.D.* Reading, Pa: D. Miller.
66. Although Yoder (1976, 239) suggests that "Zieh an dein Gift" might have come from "Zing," earlier sources, such as Helfenstein ([1810], 29), offer the former version suggesting that Hohman's was derivative or over-heard.
67. For the most recent, complete edition of Hohman's *Long Lost Friend*, see: Hohman, Johann Georg, and Daniel Harms. 2012. *The Long-Lost Friend: A 19th Century American Grimoire*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications.
68. Harms 2012, 5-6.
69. Bötte, Gerd-J. and Tannhof, Werner. 1989. *The First Century of German Language Printing in the United States of America*. Göttingen, DE: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek.
70. For a modern translation of *The Friend in Need*, see: Donmoyer, Patrick J. 2012 *The Friend in Need: An Annotated Translation of an Early Pennsylvania Folk Healing Manual*. Kutztown, PA: Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.
71. Donmoyer 2012, 13-15; Ritter, Johann. 1813. *Readinger Adler*. Feb 9 (841):2.
72. Yoder 1976, 244.
73. Yoder 1976, 238.
74. The only known copy of this rare edition of *Das vortreffliche Zigeuner-Büchlein* is at the Library Company of Philadelphia, attributed to the press of Heinrich B. Sage of Reading, Pennsylvania, ca. 1810. The subtitle matches European imprints of the *Romanus-Büchlein*, bearing the false imprint of "Venedig" : "Gott der Herr bewahre meine Seele, meinen Aus- uod [sic] Eingang; von nun an bis in alle Ewigkeit, Amen. Halleluja." See also, Spamer, Adolf and Nickel, Johanna. 1958. *Romanusbüchlein: Historisch-philologischer Kommentar zu einem deutschen Zauberbuch*. Berlin, DE: Akademie Verlag, 26.
75. [Author's translation]Hohman 1820, 12.
76. Hohman 1820, 9.
77. Rix, Alice. 1900. "The Reading Witch Doctor's Sway Over the Trusting and the Ignorant." Philadelphia, PA: *North American*, 22 May, 129:16.
78. Brubaker, Henry C. 1928. "Witch Murderer Under Suspicion in Girls' Slaying." Philadelphia, PA: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 Dec
78. Interest in the murder case was largely due to the classic journalistic account by Philadelphia author Arthur Lewis, *Hex*. (1969. New York: Trident Press), and later revisited, see: McGinnis, J. Ross. 2000. *Trials of Hex*. Davis/Trinity Co. McGinnis' work recently served as the basis for a feature-length independent motion picture called *Hex Hollow* (2016).
79. Advertisement for the Louis de Claremont edition of Hohman's *Long Lost Friend*, featured in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 29, 1939.
80. A copy of this edition is in the collection of the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.
81. The following sections owe a great deal to the works of Ezra Grumbine (1905), Edwin Miller Fogel (1915), and Thomas Brendle (edited by C. Richard Beam, 1995). While many of these authors were collecting what they called "beliefs" or "superstitions" a large majority of their entries were precise descriptions of the specific procedures and timing of ritual process. Collectively these three works form the largest repository of domestic and agricultural accounts of ritual for the Pennsylvania Dutch.
82. Donmoyer 2016, 33-34.
83. Interview 5 Sept 2016 with informant from northern Lehigh County.
84. Fogel 1995, 40.
85. Donmoyer, Patrick. 2014. "Pennsylvania Folkways: Pennsylvania Folkways: What do wine, placentas and Charlemagne have in common?" *Berks Country. Sept 3*. Reading, PA: Reading Eagle Co.
86. Fogel 29.
87. Interview 4 July 2012, with M. H. from Boyertown, Berks County.
88. Fogel 34.
89. Fogel 33.
90. Brendle & Beam 1995, 80, 89, 92-3.
91. Fogel 133.
92. Fogel 126.
93. Fogel 131.
94. Brendle & Beam 1995, 5.
95. Fogel 122.
96. Fogel 123-125.
97. Donmoyer, Patrick. 2012. "'Conrad Raber His Doctor Book': A Translation of an early Berks County Veterinary Healing Manual." *Heritage Center News*. 55(5). Kutztown, PA: PA German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.
98. Grumbine 1905.
99. Savidge, Richard. 2012. *Hexe Glaawe*. Heggins, PA: Richard Savidge Dialect Publication. This same process appears among Mexican Americans in John Steinbeck's third novel *To A God Unknown*, (1933, NY: Robert O. Ballou).
100. This echoes statements in Luther's *Table Talks*, in Fogel 116-117.
101. Helfenstein [1810], 67; Fogel 1995, 116-117.
102. This anecdote is associated with three holes bored in the wooden lintel of the bakeoven at the Schaeffer House, Historic Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania.
103. Fogel 75.
104. Fogel 165.
105. Donmoyer 2012, 91; Meyer, Elard Hugo. 1900. *Badisches Volksleben im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Strassburg, DE: Karl J. Trübner, 374; Fogel 100-101.
106. Erich, Oswald A and Richard Beitel. 1936. *Wörterbuch der deutschen Volkskunde*. Leipzig, DE: Alfred Kroner Verlag, 699;
107. Donmoyer 2012, 30-31.



Clockwise from top left: Bible-board with carved symbols, used by a powwow doctor near Emmaus, Lehigh County. Heilman Collection of Patrick J. Donmoyer. Gift of Willard Martin; Asaphoetida bags used to ward off illness, mid-19th Century, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Courtesy of Clarke Hess; Ritual doll, concealed in late 18th-century Lancaster County log house. Courtesy of Clarke Hess; Concealed shoe and penny, discovered in 1867 log house from Bern Township, Berks County. Courtesy of Jim and Marcia Houston.

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