

# A Colorful Folk

Pennsylvania Germans & the Art of Everyday Life



WINTERTHUR



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Der dein Leben vom verderbte  
Erlösset, der dich crönet  
und du Wieder Jung

Sie Werden geCrönet  
und palmen zueigen in ihren

Und wie Ich Euch getragen habe, Wie auf  
Adlers flügeln, und habe Euch zu Mir  
gebracht, Wer der Ihr Meiner stime Nun  
Behorchen, und Meinen bund  
halten, so soll Ihr Mein

Wie ein Adler auf seine Junge  
und über ihnen schwebet, Er breitet  
Seine stärke aus, und nahm ihn und  
rug in auf seinen flügeln, Der  
Herr setze in und war

Wie theuer Ist Deine Güte, Gott, Das Menschen  
Kind der Unter Dem Schatten Deiner flügel frucht

breite deine gute über die, die dich sehn  
und deine gerechtigkeit über die fromen  
Psalm 36 v. 10 Den Herr du zueignest  
die gerecht

Voll Sey Mir gnädig, Den auf dich frucht Meine Seele  
Und unter Dem Schatten deiner flügel habe Ich zu frucht,  
Psalm 36 v. 10

Den Er hat Seinen Engeln befohlen über dir  
Das sie dich behüten Auf allen deine wege

Das Sie dich Auf Den Sünden  
Engen Ruffe dich An ihn Der Noth So wil ich





## INTRODUCTION

This catalogue and the accompanying exhibition explore the unique world of the Pennsylvania Germans and their colorful folk art, including decorated manuscripts (fraktur), textiles, furniture, metalwork, and pottery. Embellished with hearts, flowers, birds, and other traditional motifs, these objects reveal a love of color, design, and whimsy. Most are functional, but others were made “just for nice” and attest to the Pennsylvania Germans’ penchant for decorating virtually everything from a tiny pincushion to the side of a barn. Household interiors were also quite vibrant, as seen in a portrait of the Sprenger family of Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania. Boldly patterned wallpaper and carpet adorn the room, where the family sits on yellow bamboo-style Windsor chairs with painted floral motifs on the crest rails (**fig. 1**).



**Fig. 1.** Portrait of Johann Abraham Sprenger and family, attributed to Jacob Maentel, Schaefferstown, Lebanon County, Pa., ca. 1825.  
Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1957.1.123



The Pennsylvania Germans (also known as the Pennsylvania Dutch) descend from the approximately 80,000 German-speaking people who had immigrated to Pennsylvania by 1775 and who made up about 40 percent of the population in the southeastern part of the state by 1790. Most inhabited the counties of Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Northumberland, and York. A sizeable number of Pennsylvania Germans also lived in Philadelphia, where in 1800 people of German heritage vied with those of English ancestry as the largest ethnic group in the city, with both populations estimated at 32 to 35 percent of the total 68,000 residents. Many German émigré artisans worked in the city, including John Lewis Krimmel, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1809. He is best known for painting scenes of everyday life but also made portraits such as the one of Juliana Wunderlich (Wonderly), who wears a fashionable white dress that gives no hint of her ethnic or religious background (fig. 2). Her father, Wilhelm, was a prominent member of Zion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia.



Fig. 2. Portrait of Juliana Wunderlich, by John Lewis Krimmel, Philadelphia, Pa., 1812. Private collection

The German-speaking population in southeastern Pennsylvania was diverse in its European origins and religious beliefs. Most emigrated from the Palatinate region of southwest Germany, and approximately 90 percent belonged to the Lutheran or German Reformed Church. Some were French Huguenots who had sought refuge in Germany following the reemergence of strong Catholic leadership in France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The remainder, about 10 percent, consisted primarily of sectarian groups, including the Amish and Mennonites, largely from the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland; Schwenkfelders, from Silesia (part of modern-day Poland); and Moravians, predominantly from Bohemia and Moravia. A small number were Catholic. Although meetinghouses were generally plain, many Pennsylvania German churches featured decorative elements, such as the extraordinary pair of wrought-iron weathervanes made in 1743 for Augustus Lutheran Church in Trappe, Pa. (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Pair of weathervanes, possibly Friedrich Marstellar, Trappe, Montgomery County, Pa., 1743. Augustus Lutheran Church, Trappe, Pa. (Photo, Glenn Holcombe)



Meet the Collectors

Winterthur is one of the leading institutions for the study and collection of Pennsylvania German folk art. This catalogue highlights the legacy of two extraordinary individuals, **Henry Francis du Pont** (1880–1969) and **Frederick Sheely Weiser** (1935–2009). H. F. du Pont, who opened Winterthur as a museum in 1951, was a pioneering collector. More than a dozen rooms at Winterthur are furnished with Pennsylvania German architecture and decorative arts, including an extraordinarily vibrant *Kleiderschrank* (clothes cupboard) that retains much of its original painted decoration (**fig. 4**).

In 2013 Winterthur acquired 121 fraktur and nearly 200 textiles from the collection of Frederick S. Weiser (denoted with an \*), a Lutheran minister, scholar, and collector of Pennsylvania German decorative arts. His home, Parrehof (“preacher’s farm” in Pennsylvania Dutch), was furnished with many local antiques. From 1966 to 1982 Pastor Weiser was editor for the Pennsylvania German Society and oversaw the publication of numerous books and articles on fraktur; furniture, textiles, and church records. Over the years he researched and identified many important fraktur artists,

including Samuel Bentz, Conrad Gilbert, and Daniel Otto (**fig. 5**). Building on Pastor Weiser’s research, scholars have recently discovered that fraktur artist Henrich Otto (Daniel’s father) was also a decorator of painted furniture, based on a careful analysis of his handwriting and decorative motifs (**fig. 6**). Paint-decorated chests are one of the most iconic and recognizable forms in Pennsylvania German folk art. The colorful floral motifs and extraordinary pair of camels that dominate the facade of this example speak to the boundless creativity of Pennsylvania German artisans.



Fig. 4. Schrang, Berks County, Pa., ca. 1790. Gift of Burton and Helaine Fendelman 2009.44



Fig. 5. Drawing of two parrots, attributed to Daniel Otto, Centre County, Pa., ca. 1815. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Collectors Circle 2013.31.97\*



Fig. 6. Chest for Johannes Miller, decoration attributed to Henrich Otto, Millbach area, Lebanon County, Pa., 1783. Private collection (Photo, Gavin Ashworth)