The current exhibit “Bernhart & Company, Shenandoah Valley Folk Art Fraktur (1774-1850)” focuses primarily on the work of Peter Bernhart. He was by far the most prolific artist of the German birth and baptismal certificates in Rockingham County. There are more than thirty-five of his works displayed in the exhibit.

What do we know about this important fraktur artist?

Peter Bernhart must have been born in the mid-1700s. We know from census records that he was born before 1766. His wife was Mary, but we do not know her last name.

The couple’s first documented appearance in Valley records is in 1788 when they purchased 30.5 acres of land along the Great Wagon Road in Woodstock, Virginia. The Bernharts are said to have run an inn in Woodstock. The next year, the couple sold their Shenandoah County land and moved to Rockingham County.

In June 1789, the *Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* newspaper noted that Bernhart was now an agent for Winchester’s German-language newspaper *Virginische Zeitung* in the “Kieseltown” area of Rockingham County. In August 1789, Bernhart announced in the *Gazette* that “the first of August he commenced the business of riding as Post from Winchester to Staunton” every other week carrying mail and the English and German newspapers from Winchester.

Bernhart rode from his home near Keezletown to Winchester every other Wednesday to begin his route. He arrived in Rockingham County by Friday and finished the route in Staunton on Saturday. Bernhart functioned as post rider over this course for nearly thirty years, from 1789 to 1817. He described the mail he carried as all that “any person may wish to forward with care.” When regular mail service began between the two Valley towns, Bernhart gave up his route.

The Bernhart family lived in Mountain Valley north of Keezletown near Armentrout’s Church in 1791. He taught a German school in the log schoolhouse at the church that year. The next year, Bernhart, spelled “Barnhart,” was listed as a “tithable” in Capt. Richard Ragan’s “company” for assessment of personal property tax in Rockingham County. Bernhart did not own a horse at the time. This is strange for one who used a horse to ride his post route. Bernhart sold some of his Mountain Valley land in two parcels in 1792 and 1793.
Calendar Of Events

Through Jan. 12, 2012: "Bernhart & Company: Shenandoah Valley Folk Art as Fraktur (1774-1850)." To learn more, see page 4.

July 23 and Aug. 27: Visit the Cromer-Trumbo House and learn more from costumed docents. Silver Lake Mill and Fort Harrison will also be open. 11 a.m. -3 p.m. $5 admission includes Museum/Library visit.

July 23: Fraktur Drawing Workshop, with local fraktur artist Joan Shaver. Learn the history, styles and symbolism of these commemorative documents and then create your own. All skill levels. Noon-2p.m. $20 fee includes personal supplies for each student. Light refreshments. Bring a brown bag lunch.

Aug. 25: “A Celebration of Life: Shenandoah Valley Fraktur and Related Works on Paper,” with Jeffrey Evans. An examination of newly discovered artists, re-attributions and ongoing research, as well as a comparative study of cultural symbolism employed on Shenandoah Valley fraktur and the decorative arts of the region. 7 p.m. Free.


Oct. 20: “Felix Gilbert’s Daybook,” lecture with Clive Hallman. 7 p.m. Free.

Nov. 5: Fraktur Drawing Workshop, with local fraktur artist Joan Shaver. All skill levels. Noon-2p.m. $20 fee includes personal supplies for each student. Light refreshments. Bring a brown bag lunch.
On the Website

Materials continue to be added to the Heritage Museum’s new website (www.heritagecenter.com), which features new exhibits, databases, research and events.

One valuable link for researchers features the museum’s archive collections. To visit from the HRHS home page, use the blue menu bar to click on Archives>Documents>Finding Aids.

Several HRHS collections are stored at James Madison University. To learn more about these collections, click on Archives>Other Collections.

Back on the HRHS blue menu bar click on Home>What’s New to find out about recent updates to the online database.

Names are being entered from various important documents, including a list of Rockingham County property owners in the late 1700s - early 1800’s.

Names are also being entered from Rockingham County cemeteries. Originally documented in 1967, the index of names has been checked for accuracy and updated for new burials, thanks to countless hours of work from HRHS volunteers.

The updated data has been provided to the Rockingham County GenWeb site. At this point, the GenWeb webmaster has retired and a new volunteer is being sought. If interested, please contact our office staff. A number of small family cemeteries are not yet on the website as they have just been completed.

Seymour Paul
Technology Committee

A Warm Welcome to Our New Members

Bob Bersson & Delores Shoup, Bridgewater, VA
Kathleen Borne, Fairview Park, OH
Lee Bouchard, Fossill, OR
Saundra Buck, Baltimore, MD
Marilyn Burns, Rocky Mount, VA
Lisa Chase, Tucson, AZ
Cody Cornett, Harrisonburg, VA
Karen Craun, Harrisonburg, VA
Lisa & Todd Eppard, Harrisonburg, VA
Robert Frye, Mount Jackson, VA
Leslie Hall, Waynesboro, VA
Kay Hall, Punta Gordo, FL
Michael Helmantoler, Sandy, UT
Jennifer Hill, Ruthen Glen, VA
Michele Houchens, Minooka, IL
William Hudgins, Petersburg, WV
John Huntingdon, Spotsylvania, VA
Gordon & Margaret Jones, Manassas, VA
Tracie Jones, Bowie, MD
Manny Jose, Harrisonburg, VA

Warren Knicely, Harrisonburg, VA
Rebecca & Hugh Lamb, Stuarts Draft, VA
Wesley Loomis, McGaheysville, VA
Barry Kline, Annandale, VA
Betty May, Alexandria, VA
John McLuckie, Jefferson, MD
Edward Moore, Harrisonburg, VA
Edward Morris, Penn Laird, VA
Kevin Pirkey & Family, Rochester, NH
Marcia Rinehart, Leawood, KS
Dorothy & Robinson Risner, Bridgewater, VA
Jessica Simmers, Baltimore, MD
Ann Thomas, Front Royal, VA
Eilene Toppin Ording, Kansas City, MO
Pat Warner, Indianapolis, IN
Charles Wertz, Lebanon, PA
Juanita Wysong, Port Republic, VA

We hope to see you soon in the galleries and library!

INTERESTED IN MAKING A DONATION TO OUR COLLECTIONS OR ARCHIVES?

For artifacts unique to Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, please schedule an appointment with our Collections Review Committee. Artifacts must be reviewed before being accepted into the permanent collection. If you are interested in donating papers or books, please hold them until the fall. We are completing a full inventory of our archives and will not be taking new paper items until we complete this important task. Thank you for keeping HRHS in your thoughts and for allowing us to process your items with thoroughness and care.
Many Hands Make Light Work at Fraktur Exhibit

Team collects and researches images

By Lauren Jefferson

In the 18th and 19th century, fraktur were common ways to commemorate important family occasions, like housewarmings, births and weddings. The most prolific local fraktur artist among the German-Swiss community was schoolmaster Peter Bernhart and a new exhibit at the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society in Dayton celebrates his work as well as that of eight others and a few—such as “The Brock’s Gap Artist” and “The Stony Creek Artist”—known only by their work’s locale.

The exhibit, titled "Bernhart & Company: Shenandoah Valley Folk Art Fraktur (1774-1850)" and open through Jan. 12, 2012, features more than seventy fraktur—many donated by local families.

The exhibit was inspired by—and dedicated to—former member John Stewart, an Austrian-born linguist and educator who taught at Harrisonburg High School and James Madison University. Stewart died in 2010, said exhibit committee chairwoman Bonnie Paul.

“John was a real advocate for Peter Bernhart and thought his work deserved to be showcased in an exhibit like this,” Paul said. “We had many conversations about fraktur and I’m sorry that John can’t be here to enjoy this.”

A founder of the Shenandoah Folk-life Society and an enthusiastic record-er of “Low German” culture, Stewart promoted local fraktur as fine examples of folk art. While they might be “admittedly crude and primitive, as compared to the exquisitely executed pen work of Pennsylvania folk artists,” as Stewart said in one lecture, they were also valuable expressions of their rural origins.

Planning for the exhibit started months ago, with a publicity campaign to find local, privately-owned fraktur. Potential donors were promised anonymity, a digital image of their fraktur and a copy of the translation, if necessary.

The effort resulted in several fraktur that had never been seen before outside of the family, Paul said. "It was amazing to me that people held on to these little gems. It is estimated that one-tenth of those created are still in existence. By the latest count, there are about sixty Bernhardt pieces and we have thirty-four represented here.”

With the fraktur themselves came stories of their origins: some had been passed down, still bearing pocket-size creases and fold marks. Others had been secreted away and found by a later generation.

"Often they were found up in rafters in a house, and they say that might be for protection, to be closer to God," Paul said. "There was one found in a washtub in Timberville.”

Another fraktur was found in 2002 under some biscuits inside a grandfather clock in the Kyger Pence Funeral Home near McGaheysville.

Laying the Foundation
The exhibit was a joint effort of a special committee, led by Paul. Lorraine Good and Mary Southerly managed the donor contracts and "tracked down pieces to fill in the gaps," Paul said.

Many Hands Make Light Work at Fraktur Exhibit

Special thanks to the HRHS Fraktur Exhibits Committee:

Cathy Baugh
Lois Bowman
Elizabeth Eggleston
Lorraine Good
Margaret Hotchner
Allen Litten
Jean Litten
Dale MacAllister
Bonnie Paul
Harry Rawley
Pat Ritchie
Mary Southerly
Nancy Stewart
Kaylor Collection Donated to HRHS

By Lawrence D. Bowers, Jr.

The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society’s photographic archive has received an important collection by Lewis Lupton Kaylor (1889-1963), a Rockingham County native, professional photographer, and early aerial military photographer. The addition of approximately 500 photographs and negatives to our collection has been made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Polly Frye, herself a professional photographer. Mrs. Frye and her husband, Charles W. Frye, Jr., owned and operated Charles & Polly Photographers in Harrisonburg from 1951-1967.

The donated Kaylor images cover the period from 1937 to 1949 and depict people, civic clubs, businesses, high school football and basketball teams, etc. that create a wonderful sense of the Harrisonburg community during the important World War II era.

A Local Life

Lewis Lupton Kaylor was born in the Pleasant Valley community of Rockingham County, Virginia, where his family owned and operated a mill.

He was operating a photographic studio in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, when the United States entered World War I. Kaylor was forced to close his studio when he was drafted into the Army in September 1917. The Army eventually put his talents as a photographer to work taking and developing aerial photographs, making him one of the early pioneers in this new technology.

The record of Kaylor’s military service in the United States and France is well-documented by his diary that has been edited by his grandson Alan Kaylor Cline. The diary, along with many photographs, is available online at www.cs.utexas.edu/us. This highly recommended site is the source of much of this information about Kaylor.

Return to the Valley

Kaylor was discharged from the Army in December 1918 and by 1926, he had returned to Rockingham County where he worked with William Dean, an established photographer who had worked in Harrisonburg since 1865. Their studio was known as the Dean-Kaylor Studio. This studio continued under this name even after the retirement of Mr. Dean for the next 26 years.

In 1951, failing health led Kaylor to sell his business to Charles and Polly Frye.

The Frye Connection

Mrs. Frye, or Polly as she is known to her many friends in this area, was born and grew up in Keezletown, Virginia, and married Charles W. Frye, a native of nearby Mount Crawford, in 1949. She got her start in photography as a young woman retouching negatives for a local studio that still operates in Harrisonburg.

After service in the United States Navy, Charles received photographic training in Silver Spring, Maryland. With the purchase of Mr. Kaylor’s business, Charles and Polly acquired large format cameras, existing negatives and prints and other equipment. For the next 16 years, Charles & Polly Photographers operated as one of the leading studios in the central Shenandoah Valley, producing thousands of images of the people and events in the Valley.

In 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, Mr. Frye was recalled to active duty in the Navy and for several years, Polly ran the Harrisonburg studio with the help of her faithful employee, Virginia B. Long.

The Harrisonburg studio closed in 1967 and for the next 20 years, Polly operated the business as Polly Frye Photographer from her residence in Keezletown. Mr. Frye died in 1975. Polly now resides in the retirement community in Park View and still maintains her interest in photography and Harrisonburg history.

The Society is deeply appreciative of this gift by Mrs. Frye and thanks her not only for the gift, but also for the wisdom of recognizing the value of these images. Preserving them for future generations will provide a photographic window through which to see Harrisonburg as it was during those years.
It is not known precisely how Bernhart managed to juggle both school teaching and post riding at the same time. One may assume he simply scheduled his classes for days he was free to teach. One of Bernhart’s students testified in an 1820 court case that Bernhart also “served as a scrivener for illiterate neighbors.” A scrivener wrote documents for those who could not perform the task themselves. Bernhart is said to have later taught school in McGaheysville.

By 1797, Bernhart appears in Rockingham County tax records as the owner of two parcels of land, of six acres and seven acres, in the area near Armentrout’s Church. The 1810 census for Rockingham County indicates that the family was living in the Friedens Church neighborhood. Rockingham County land tax records for 1815 do not list Bernhart as the owner of any land.

Descendants

Peter Bernhart had at least five children: Henry, George, Elizabeth, Magdalene, and Margaret.

Henry Bernhart married Mary “Polly” Wolfensbarger in Greenbrier County. Polly was the daughter of Peter and Susannah Wolfensbarger. Both Henry Bernhart and the Wolfensbargers had lived in Shenandoah County before moving to Greenbrier. Henry and Polly Bernhart resettled in Dearborn County, Indiana. Henry is said to have died at Vincennes, Indiana, during the War of 1812. Their children preserved an oral history that their grandfather, Peter Bernhart, was crippled during his Revolutionary War service.

George Bernhart married Magdalene Zimmers [Simmers], daughter of Michael Zimmers, in Rockingham County. The couple had several children who were baptized at Friedens Church in the county. Elizabeth Bernhart was confirmed at Friedens Church. Elizabeth married Jacob Peter Eckert [Eckerd] in Rockingham County. Eckert was born near Mannheim, Germany. He immigrated to America in 1804, embarking at Amsterdam and landing at Norfolk, Virginia, after a 26-week voyage. The Eckert family emigrated from Rockingham County to Jefferson County, Kentucky. They then moved to near Dayton, Ohio, and later to Miltonville, in Butler County, Ohio. The Eckert family also preserved the family story that Elizabeth’s father Peter Bernhart was in the Revolutionary War.

Margaret Bernhart was also confirmed at Friedens Church. She married John Sites, the son of Christian and Elisabeth Reimel Seitz [Sites], in Rockingham County. Margaret died in Preble County, Ohio.

Peter Bernhart is best known as the fraktur artist who, in the best German tradition, painted the highly decorative birth, baptismal, and marriage certificates. Although he was not a great speller, Bernhart’s fraktur work is among the more colorful and productive in the Valley. His fraktur dated from about 1796 through the 1820s. Historian Klaus Wust called Bernhart’s designs, although crudely executed, quite colorful and “replete with tulips, other floral shapes, and a parrot-like bird.” They were made for families from Frederick to Augusta County. Bernhart’s fraktur work also included house blessings, religious puzzles, and poems and songs that he had printed to sell to his customers.

Valley folk life expert John Stewart studied Peter Bernhart for years and felt Bernhart’s work should be shown in a major exhibit. We have now made that wish a splendid reality.

References

The mural is open to the public during regular hours; however, you do have to navigate past skeptical security agents. Leave your cell phone in the car (they will make you take it back to your car—no excuses). Be sure to have a look around the north corner, as the mural extends in a wrap-around fashion all the way around that corner. Cameras must be cleared prior to arriving with the building superintendent.
Robert Dalessandro was appointed Executive Director/Chief of Military History at the U.S. Army Center of Military History in February 2011.

A retired colonel, he is considered one of the foremost experts on battlefield interpretation and is widely published on the culture of the American soldier.

After graduating in 1980 from Virginia Military Institute with a degree in history, Dalessandro was commissioned in the U.S. Army. He served in a wide variety of leadership and staff assignments, including commands at the company, depot, and battalion levels and staff assignments at echelons of command from battalion through Department of the Army level. Dalessandro retired in 2009 after serving as the Director of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, PA. Since then, he has served as the Assistant Chief of Military History at the Center of Military History, working a wide range of administrative, technical, museum, and policy issues.

His graduate studies include work at the College of William and Mary, where he studied historical archaeology; a master’s degree in Military Arts and Science in history from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; a master’s degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College; and a graduate certificate in museum collections management and care from George Washington University.

He is editor of the Army Officer’s Guide, and co-author of two books, Willing Patriots: Men of Color in the First World War; and American Lions: The 332nd Infantry Regiment in Italy in World War I.

In addition, another book he co-authored, Organization and Insignia of the American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1923 received the Army Historical Foundation award for excellence in writing.

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New In The HRHS Bookstore

Now featuring the work of local member and fraktur artist, Joan Shaver. Ms. Shaver specializes in the style of the Pennsylvania Germans (Deutsch). Her artwork reflects her Shenandoah Valley heritage or, as the Lancaster County cousins would say, Valley Deutsch. Items for sale include original fraktur in frames, on old coffeepots and a stool. No surface is out of bounds!

GREAT NEWS!
Upon receipt of this newsletter the new HRHS online bookstore should be up and running. We are certain this will offer a much easier and customer-friendly shopping experience. Please visit from the HRHS website Bookstore link.

Order by phone
540-879-2616,
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Civil War Trivia
Norman Bolotin with Nicholle Carriere.
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How much do we know about the real lives of Americans on the battlefields and in trenches and winter quarters when the soldiers had a respite from combat? Civil War Trivia looks inside the conflict to examine the many fascinating and heartrending stories about this great war.

NEW AND RETURNING Valuable Resources for the Researcher!
Carrie Eldridge, $15.00 each

An Atlas of Appalachian Trails to the Ohio River. America’s earliest migration trails leading west. The atlas covers the settlement period from 1625 to 1775, with emphasis on our first frontier, mainly western VA/NC. 11 x 17 with full maps.

An Atlas of German Migration and America. German immigration is traced both across the European continent and in America, from the Palatines before 1700 to various small groups who settled in many different US states through the Civil War. 11 x 17 visual story.

Shenandoah National Park and Its Neighbors
Anne Frederick
$21.99

The author has compiled a fascinating visual history from her extensive postcard collection that allows readers an opportunity to tour the SNP of yesteryear and some of its outlying towns, both large and small. A wonderful vehicle for both young and old to learn more about the area’s past and experience its environmental splendor.
Thank you to all the volunteers who participated in the walking of the 470-plus cemeteries in Rockingham County. Beginning in 2001, volunteers recorded names and photographed tombstones to recheck the original records of 1967. A special thanks to Martha Lee, Nettie Lee, Bennie Getz, Walter Mason, Graham and Barbara Hensley, Seymour Paul, Harriet Welch, Deb Wake, Gene Holsinger, Connie Correa, Hugh Hutchens, Robert Crawford, Judith Boyers, Mary Nelson, Pat Ritchie, Sue Propst and others that contributed to this project. Many researchers have benefited from our labors.

Bob and Lois Emswiler

Whether you are just getting started or a seasoned searcher . . .

Visit our extensive Genealogy Library

Tuesday - Saturday 10 am - 5 pm
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We have one of the largest collections of Rockingham County records.

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SCAVENGER HUNT - How well do you know your Museum?

If this doesn’t look familiar then it’s time for a visit!
We hope to see you soon!

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Editor’s Note:
The Diary of John B. Sheets, of Mt. Crawford, Co. I, 33rd Virginia Infantry, C.S.A., transcribed by Dale Harter, will continue in the Fall 2011 newsletter.
ON THE WEB: Two new databases provide resources

Track A Soldier To Battle

More than two million soldiers fought in the American Civil War and more of them fought in Virginia than in any other state. Millions of Americans today are descendants of Civil War soldiers who fought in Virginia. Now for the first time visitors can track the movements of a soldier or regiment with the new Walk In Their Footsteps program at www.VirginiaCivilWar.org/footsteps.

The database of military regiments identifies the battles in which those regiments fought. Having identified a particular regiment of interest, a visitor can track the movements of that unit from battlefield to battlefield. The website provides regimental histories and descriptions of battles fought and casualties sustained. An accompanying map pinpoints the location of each battlefield and offers links to available photos, illustrations, and historical narratives.

The site also links to a wealth of history and genealogy resources, like military records, census data, birth and death records, and a state-by-state listing of sources.

Slave Names Database To Launch In September

The Virginia Historical Society recently received a $100,000 grant from Dominion Resources and The Dominion Foundation to fund the creation of Unknown No Longer: A Database of Virginia Slave Names. This free, online database will contain personal information about enslaved Virginians gleaned from some of the more than eight million processed manuscripts in VHS collections. VHS will launch the database in September with 1,000 names.

It is the first of its kind in the United States, said VHS president and CEO Paul Levengood.

The road from emancipation and Reconstruction to the civil rights movement and the election of Virginia’s first black governor is well documented in Virginia history. But early African American history (from the arrival of the first slaves through the Civil War) is often represented only through the words of white observers, freed persons who looked back on slavery many years later, or the records generated by others about African Americans who achieved recognition for their actions. For most enslaved Americans, the only physical record of their existence may be a name in a register kept by a slave owner.

Unknown No Longer will be searchable through the use of a variety of keywords, such as name, gender, location, occupation, and plantation. It will also include images of original source documents for easy reference.

“We have witnessed a growing audience frequenting the VHS in search of information that our records might provide, such as names of enslaved people, plantation sites, occupation and family relations, values, and birth, death, or sale dates,” said chief librarian Frances Pollard.

“Existing databases profile specific plantations and ship manifests with African names of their human cargo or other forced migratory information,” said curator of African American history Dr. Lauranett Lee, who will oversee the Unknown No Longer research. Unknown No Longer will be the first database of names that relate back to plantations or places of work across all of slaveholding Virginia.”

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From the desk of the Executive Director:

At the eve of my first anniversary at The Heritage Museum and Historical Society, I would like to say a special “thank you” to all of you for helping to make this organization such a wonderful place. In the last year, we have welcomed exhibits on Hotchkiss and Fraktur, expanded our genealogy library due to many kind gifts, held fascinating programs on the Civil War and local history, increased visitation to our facilities, and gratefully received donations of time, talent, and funds. We are very, very thankful for all of these contributions.

I am regularly amazed by our volunteers and the dedication they have to HRHS. Each volunteer contributes unique talents that continually make our organization stronger. I am also very grateful for the efforts by staff members Penny Imeson, Amy Kiracofe, Cameran Hupp, Juanita Wysong, Laura Adams, and Lauren Jefferson to keep HRHS running like a top. This is an exceptional place with exceptional people.

If you haven’t been in for a while, please stop in for a visit. Our newest exhibit on Shenandoah Valley Folk Art Fraktur is breathtaking and instructive. Our bookstore has been recently restocked and our gift shop is full of beautiful and hand-made items for your home, including original Fraktur prints by local artist Joan Shaver. Our library beckons with family secrets waiting to be unlocked and there are many exciting programs on our calendar.

Our membership renewal begins in earnest in September and we hope you will remain part of our vibrant and active family. We also hope you will consider a financial contribution to boost our efforts to continue to grow and thrive in sustainable ways. Thank you again for your support of The Heritage Museum and The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society. We cannot meet our mission to collect and preserve Central Shenandoah Valley culture for the research by and the education of future generations without your support.

Warm regards,

Ann-marie