



K u t z t o w n . A r e a . C h a m b e r . o f . C o m m e r c e

"Serving the East Penn Valley"

March 10, 1999

Representative Paul C. Semmel
4525 Spring Hill Drive
Schnecksville, PA 18078

Dear Mr. Semmel:

We ask that you ask the State Legislature and Governor Ridge to recognize Kutztown, Pennsylvania as the site of the first folklife festival in America. We would ask that a proclamation be made and that the last week of June be declared Pennsylvania Folklife Festival Week to be celebrated in Kutztown, Pennsylvania annually.

Included is a history of the progression of the folk festivals which have been held in Kutztown for 50 years. Also included are published articles by scholars attesting to the history.

If you need any further information or details, please feel free to contact us. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance in this very important matter.

Very truly yours,

Rita M. Phillips
President

Larry C. Biehl
Executive Director

PROPOSED PROCLAMATION

Whereas, the community of Kutztown, Pa took the lead in establishing the first folklife festival in the United States, and since that time, others have used the Kutztown model as a prototype for the creation of additional festivals; and

Whereas, highly dedicated scholars researching and attempting to save the culture folkways and folklife of the Pa Germans continue to support and encourage the continuance of this festival through their research have amassed an amazing body of information that should be disseminated to the people of the Commonwealth, and

Whereas, the continuation and study of the Pa German culture helps prepare the people of the Commonwealth for entry into the 21st century by encouraging our youth to study the mores, cultural values and folkways/folklife of those proud pioneers that peopled the early colony of Pa.; and

Whereas, the festival will continue to promote research, scholarship and understanding of this vital ethnic group, And through this research create a better informed citizenry.

Therefore, in special recognition of the contributions made by the people of Kutztown, and those dedicated Pa German Scholars, I, Tom Ridge, Gov. of Commonwealth of Pa hereby proclaim the last week of June to be Pa Folklife Festival Week, to be celebrated annually at Kutztown, Pa.



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"Serving the East Penn Valley"

In 1950, the first folklife festival in America was held in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Started by 3 Pennsylvania German scholars, Drs. Alfred L. Shoemaker, Don Yoder and J. William Frey, the intent of the folklife festival was to display an entire rural culture, the Pennsylvania Dutch (or Pennsylvania German), to the public in a non-traditional manner. Loosely basing their venue on European exhibitions of regional ethnology, these professors brought to the American public a full understanding of all aspects of the Pennsylvania Dutch culture in a hands-on, participatory manner.

For the first time ever in America, the public was able to participate in a culture: handle the tools, talk with shinglemakers, soapboilers, butchers, funnelcake cooks and powwowers. They could learn to speak some of the dialect, learn the history, listen to the local folklore, and hear the songs and music of the Pennsylvania Dutch. The public could watch the weddings, funerals, church services, and harvest dinners unique to the Kutztown area at that time. A full sampling of the unique qualities of the Pennsylvania Dutch lifestyle and history were presented for the public to learn and enjoy.

The festival was designed as an experiment in adult education, a museum program, and a temporary living demonstration of a culture... an adventure in discovering a unique aspect of Pennsylvania and America.

The first festival was modest, lasting 5 days, featuring 4 tents, and manned primarily by local farm families from the surrounding area. Several thousand people attended, and the one thing remembered by all was the good feeling or "spirit" that was there. Over the next decade, the festivals held at Kutztown became the largest of their kind in the world, attracting over 100,000 people in 1960.

Throughout the following years the folklife festivals held at Kutztown brought to millions of Americans an awareness of the unique talents, gifts, and lifestyle of the Pennsylvania Dutch in the Kutztown area.

The folklife festivals held at Kutztown were the prototypes used to establish most of the Folklife festivals in America today. Across the nation, ethnic and regional cultures have used the Kutztown model to establish their own unique folklife festivals.

A folklife festival has happened at Kutztown every year since 1950, in spite of hurricanes, tornadoes, heatwaves, domestic and international crises, different sponsors and man made obstacles.

The history of the folklife festivals at Kutztown has been turbulent. Still, when the present nine day festival comes, the "good feelings" and "spirit" are still alive. That "spirit," the people of Kutztown, and the location at the Kutztown Fairgrounds, seem to have been the constant threads throughout the years that have held it together.

The current folklife festival in Kutztown, known as the Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival, is produced jointly by the Kutztown Fairgrounds and Kutztown University Foundation, making it the first "Kutztown-owned" festival in many decades.

The purpose of the Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival remains the same as that of the original founders: to bring to Americans a hands-on and living demonstration of the Pennsylvania Dutch (or Pennsylvania German) culture.

The music, food, folklore, spirituality, crafts, farming, playtime and the "Geescht" of the Pennsylvania Dutch of the Kutztown area are once more being brought to light in an accurate, substantially non-profit format. The educational seminars are presented by both Kutztown University, and the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center located in Kutztown. The community is again getting involved by working, demonstrating, and volunteering to make the Festival a success.

Most of the old-timers who started that first festival 50 years ago are no longer with us. Gone is the inspirational leadership of Dr. Shoemaker and Dr. Frey, yet we are incredibly fortunate to have with us Dr. Don Yoder, one of the original founders of the festival, and a foremost authority in the study of Pennsylvania German Culture.

Dr. Don Yoder is once again involved in the folklife festival tradition at Kutztown, advising the Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival as to content, authenticity, and... giving an unclouded vision of what the festival should be.

The folklife festival at Kutztown, Pennsylvania, the first of its kind in the nation, is itself becoming part of the nation's folklore and legends. The festival is one of America's great achievements, one that the people of Kutztown, Pennsylvania can take great pride in.