

# Kutztown Folk Festival offers fun, variety, crafts

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Between June 27 and July 5 of this year, Ray P. Hauer will have baked nearly 3,000 loaves of bread in an ancient outdoor bake oven.

Hauer, known more familiarly as "Pappy" has been firing and tending the bake oven located on the Kutztown Fair Grounds, during the annual Folk Festival, for the past twelve years.

Relying only on experience acquired over the years - without the use of modern day thermometers or temperature regulators - Pappy has tended the oven, baking thousands upon thousands of loaves of bread for visitors from as far away as Virginia, Connecticut, and Wisconsin, and possibly even foreign lands for years.

Raised on a farm near Myerstown, Hauer has spent his entire life in and around the area and speaks fluent Dutch to the women preparing the dough he will bake.

Asked how he came to be oven tender for the Kutztown Folk Festival bake oven, Hauer simply remarked that one of the women mixing the dough got him involved. And he has been returning, year after year, continuing part of a tradition of the folk festival which has been going on for the past thirty-two years.

At just about anytime during the nine-day affair, Hauer can be seen pattering around the old outdoor bakeoven.

"It's not hard," he remarked while chopping some scrap wood to be used to fire the oven, "but you can't go off to see the other sights either."

Heated with wood and relying on the retained heat of the stone walls and base of the oven to bake the bread, Hauer must replenish the heat after each baking. He "watches" the heat of the oven but usually doesn't worry about it.

"It just takes practice," he says casually. "You just use less wood if you're baking less bread."

The oven Hauer has mastered

can hold as many as forty-one loaves of bread at one time, but he bakes only the number needed. The average time needed to bake the bread is about twenty-five minutes but if a small batch is being baked, they may be done in twenty.

To fire the oven for the first day of baking, Hauer builds a wood fire in the oven at the same place the bread will be baked, opening a flue to the chimney. After a couple of hours, usually about three, Hauer rakes the fire apart, closes the flue and cleans out the embers by raking them down a chute in front of the oven to an ash pit located on the side.

Now the oven is ready to bake the bread. Hauer then places the bread in the oven by using a long-handled wooden paddle called a "peel". He closes the cast iron oven door and allows the bread to bake.

Since the oven retains heat for a long period of time, replenishing the lost heat takes only a short time before the oven is hot enough to bake another batch. By the end of the day several hundred loaves will have been baked and sold to many of the people attending the Folk Festival.

During the remaining eight days of the festival, Hauer must only fire the oven for about one hour before starting the first batch of the day — the oven is still warm from the previous day's firing.

While "Pappy" is preparing the oven for the day's baking, four or five other people are busy inside their screened-in kitchen mixing and kneading, pan after pan, of their aromatic delicacy.

Starting at 7 a.m., the first bread emerges from the bakeoven at about 11 a.m. — usually before the intrigued eyes of visitors are lured to the vicinity by the aroma of baking yeast. Many are seeing "homebaked" bread for the first time; or at least for the first time in an ancient outdoor bakeoven as many of their ancestors may have done.

The women making the dough have many years of experience attributed to their craft as well. Skilled by years of experience and much practice, several of the women have won awards in baking contests for their superb bread.

Working at the festival, Ellen Zerbe of Robesonia is the longest at baking bread. Mrs. Zerbe has been preparing dough for the Festival visitors for 24 years. She also enjoys baking bread at home and has been known to have her prize-winning product for sale.

This year's kitchen foreman, Lillian Snyder, has also made a name for herself as a skilled bread baker. Even though she has only helped at the Festival for the past four years, Mrs. Snyder won the baking contest at the Kempton Fair last year and placed second this year. Snyder is from Krumsville and enjoys baking raised cakes, and fasnachts as well.

The bakeoven and kitchen where the bread is produced has been run by the Folk Festival Society itself up until four years ago. Since that time however private entrepreneurs have managed it. This year it was run by Richard Shaner of Fleetwood who also managed it last year.

The same bread recipe has been used every year. This year whole wheat bread was added to the white and rye breads baked at the Festival. This stand also has been used to prepare dinners and pies but has come to specialize in the bread — much to the liking of the women. It got too hectic when too many activities were trying to be accomplished at once, the participants said.

Although only running the bakeoven for the past two years, Shaner has been associated with the Folk Festival for over twenty years. He also has a Seminar Stage Program each afternoon at the Folk Festival and resides in Fleetwood.

The bakeoven and its homemade products were only one of the more than two hundred crafts on display at the Folk Festival this summer.

Another craft taking more skill and talent, and not widely practiced as an essential in everyday life, is the art of Fraktur.

Originating in Germany, Fraktur is a decorative style of lettering. It is a continuation of the Medieval art of manuscript illumination, and was practiced more or less as an occupation by certain members of the Amish



Stoking up an ancient brick bread oven in preparation for turning out some of the 3,000 loaves of bread that were baked this week at the Kutztown Folk Festival is Ray "Pappy" Hauer.



Lillian Snyder, left, and Cindy Rothermel knead the dough that will be used to bake bread for the visitors at the annual Kutztown Folk Festival held between June 27 and July 5.

community to certify important family events such as births, baptisms, weddings or in teaching.

Even though it was finally replaced by the printing press, some Fraktur was practiced during the early nineteen hundreds. Most people practicing the art were school masters or ministers who would travel from farm to farm updating bibles or the like as a supplement to their incomes.

Meryl Griffiths of Lancaster has mastered the art and has many of her creations on display during the festival. Mrs. Griffiths became interested in the craft six and one-half years ago after returning from the Midwest to the area to live.

Even though she doesn't have any Pennsylvania Dutch background, Griffiths found this craft very enticing and has made it a part of her life.

Developing a style from her own handwriting, she practices the art as it was done by the early Amish. Original work was done in pastel colors, as is hers.

Being an individual kind of craft, Fraktur prints can be identified with their original creator by their unique style.

Other than for just recording important events, the craft was also used to decorate song books or for just fun. Along with the let-

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## Homestead Notes



Ivan Barnett displays his handmade weathervanes in just one of the many stands at the festival.



Fraktur, a decorative style of writing, practiced by the Amish to record special events, was displayed by Meryl Griffiths of

Lancaster. She developed a style all her own and uses this unique writing to letter handmade plaques.