

# Art of the Folk

A SEASONAL NEWSLETTER ON FOLK ARTS IN  
SCHUYLKILL, BERKS, AND LANCASTER COUNTIES

March, 2022

Vol.2



## UPCOMING FOLK EVENTS

Rhubarb Festival at Kitchen  
Kettle Village  
May 20, May 21, 2022

Block of Art  
April 30, 2022

Tamaqua Hometown Farmers  
Market and Craft Show  
May 1, 2022

## *Local Legends and Springtime Folklore*

To celebrate the new *Legend and Lore Marker* installation honoring the Hex Cat of Tumbling Run Legend, this springtime edition of the newsletter is devoted to local folklore and legends!

Below you can read about some of the folklore that has shaped beliefs and customs in Eastern Pennsylvania. Also check out our featured folk artist of the season and a traditional Easter bread recipe!



## The Hex Cat of Tumbling Run

The hex cat of tumbling run haunted the Thomas farm near Pottsville, Pennsylvania in 1911. Said to have grown until it reached four-feet tall, the hex cat was always seen prowling the property at four in the morning. When the hex cat showed up farm animals began acting strange; hens crowing like roosters, and pigs barking. Animals as well as people began to die off.

Usually great shots, everytime the Thomas's fired a bullet at the hex cat it would miss! A Thomas sister sought the help of a local witch doctor who told her to use a golden bullet instead. One was fashioned from a five-dollar gold piece and the Thomas's laid in wait but never saw the hex cat again!



**AFTER A WITCHCAT**

---

**FAMILY LIES IN WAIT WITH  
SOLID GOLD BULLET.**

---

**"Hex" Has Caused Various Kinds of  
Woe in Tumbling Run Valley and  
Can't Be Killed With Ord-  
nary Ammunition.**

---

At Tumbling Run valley, near Potts-  
ville, Pa., a family is lying in wait  
for a witchcat with a gun loaded  
with a solid gold bullet, and has also  
put a "witchcat-eating cat" on the  
trail of the "hex," or witchcat. This  
witchcat appeared at the home of  
Howell Thomas, some weeks ago. It  
was always seen at four o'clock in  
the morning prowling around the  
barnyard, and it is said to have  
grown until it was four feet long.  
It is averred that the hens began  
crowing like roosters and the pigs





## Easter Rabbit

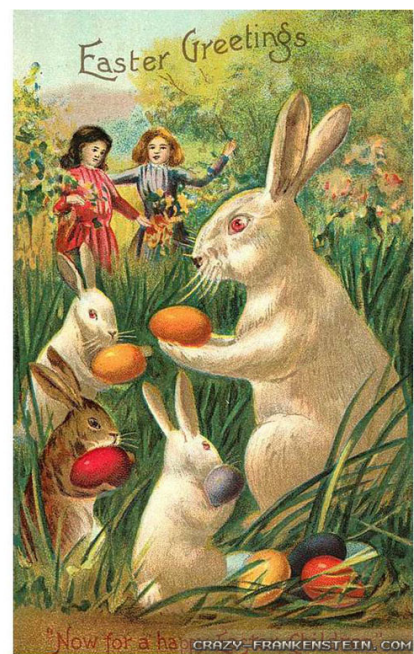
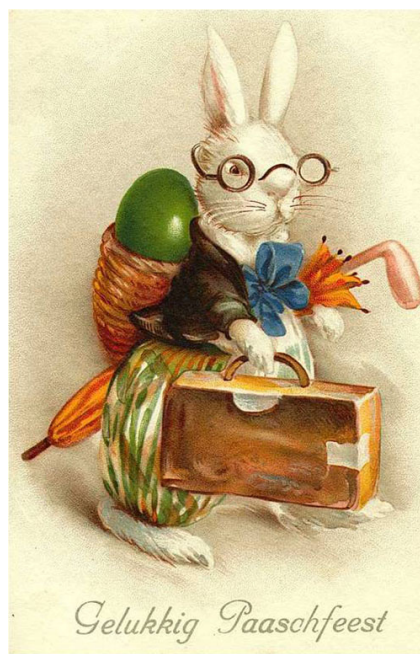
The earliest known image of the Easter Rabbit.

Johann Conrad Gilbert (1734–1812) was an American fraktur artist. An emigrant from Germany, Gilbert ultimately settled in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

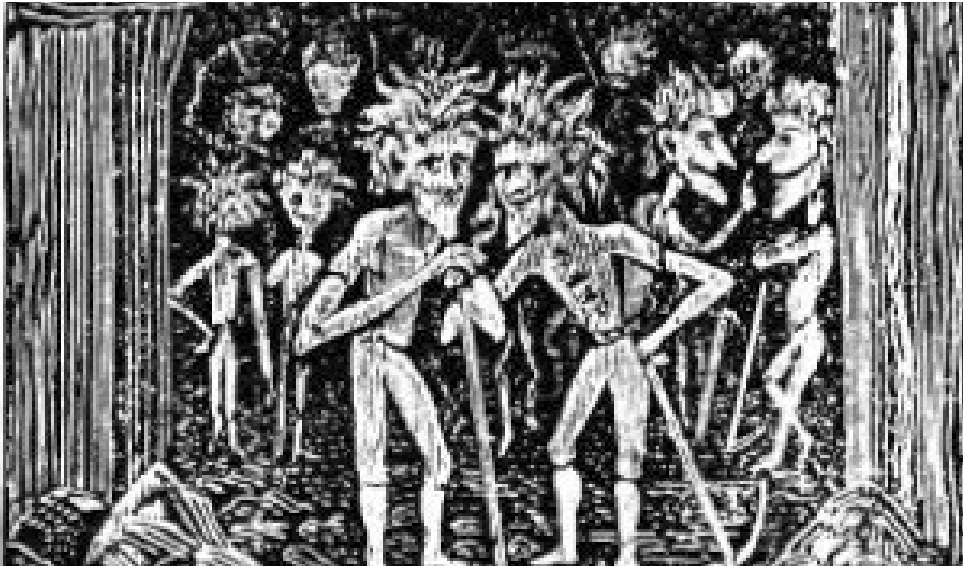
The tradition of the “Oschter Haws” – the Easter Bunny – began in Germany as early as the 16th century and was popularized in America by the Pennsylvania Dutch. The symbols of the hare and eggs predate Christianity and were associated with the ancient pagan religions: the hare was symbolic of fertility, and the egg, of rebirth or new life.

The goddess associated with Spring was known as Eostre. Folklore tells a story of Eostre saving a bird whose wings were frozen by transforming into a hare. The hare retained the ability to lay eggs and during the 18th century the Pennsylvania Dutch elaborated on the original theme by telling children that on Easter this Osterhase (Easter hare) would lay colored eggs as gifts for them if they were good.

Source Lancasetronline.com



## Tommy Knockers



Pennsylvania is famous for coal's role in its local culture and legends, of which the Tommy Knockers take the cake. The Tommy Knocker legend originated in Welsh and Cornish folklore in mines across the United Kingdom. Welsh miners brought the legend to Pennsylvania's coal mines in the 1820s and coal miners across Pennsylvania came to believe wholeheartedly in the Tommyknockers, even leaving food out for them while they worked.

Tommy Knockers were believed to be spritely spirits who dressed like the miners and performed similar duties in the mines. Both friend and foe, tales of the Tommy Knockers were used to explain the unexplainable. If a miner's light went out, and miners were stranded in total darkness, it was the trick of a Tommy Knocker. Anytime a miner narrowly escaped a tunnel collapse, it was thanks to the Tommy Knockers.

The Tommy Knockers were so important to the Cornish and Welsh miners, that many would refuse to enter a mine unless the mining company assured them their fabled companions were on duty. The practice of saying "Tommy Knockers on duty" became commonplace among management.



In response to a suggestion that radios be played in the mines to entertain miners, a local miner responded,

*“Sometimes we coal miners think we haven’t a friend in the world, but we always know the Tommy Knockers are looking out for us. Many’s the life that has been saved by these wee things with their knocking... would ye drive out the few Tommy Knockers we have left?... With all this squealing and blathering coming right through the earth, it’s bad enough for them as it is. With one of these radio boxes with its great din filling the mine, how could we hear them knocking, even if they weren’t panicked and driven away?”*

-

“Radio Causing Distress Among ‘Little Folks’ In Old County,”  
Radio by Graham McNamee, The Lincoln State Journal, Nebraska,  
Sunday, Nov. 17, 1929, Page B-Eleven

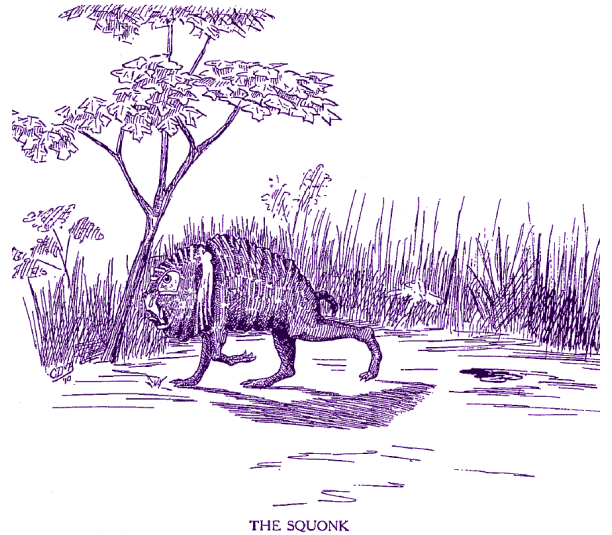
Sources: AppalachianHistory.net, NCPA Media,  
<https://pennsylvaniaparanormal.tumblr.com/>



## The Squonk

The Squonk is a mythical creature that lives in the Hemlock forest of northern Pennsylvania. Legends of Squonks probably originated in the late nineteenth century, at the height of Pennsylvania's importance in the timber industry.

The earliest known written account of Squonks comes from a book by William T. Cox called *Fearsome Creatures of the Lumberwoods*,



The legend holds that the creatures skin is ill fitting and covered in warts. Because it is ashamed of its appearance, it hides from plain sight, and spends most of its time weeping. Those who have tried catching squonks have found out the creature can dissolve completely into a pool of tears when cornered. A local man is supposed to have coaxed the creature into a bag, and when he carried it home it suddenly lightened. Upon further inspection he found that all that remained were the tears of the sad animal.



# Featured Artist

## Georgine Borchick Pysanky

Georgine Borchick is a native of McAdoo in Schuylkill county. Georgine has practiced and taught several art forms important to her Ukrainian heritage and contemporary identity. She is an ambassador of Ukrainian culture, having mastered and educating others in the folk arts of pysanky, embroidery, and traditional foodways, which she invites the larger community to participate in. Georgine continues to win awards for her Ukrainian embroidery art and her Pysanky eggs are featured in the Smithsonian Museum.

*"As long as you keep your traditions, the world will never end."*

Pysanky are decorated using the wax-resist (batik) method. Wax is used to create a pattern on the egg and then the egg is dyed. This is repeated over and over, using different colored dye each time until the pattern is complete and the wax melted away. These stunning motifs traditionally represent the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. They are traditionally given as gifts to family and friends.







## *Paska (Ukranian Easter Bread)*

This Traditional Easter Bread is a soft sweet brioche dough formed into wreaths or braided then topped with coloured eggs & sprinkles.

When it is baked in the shape of a wreath it is to symbolize the crown of thorns worn by Jesus Christ. When the dough is braided with three pieces it represents the Holy Trinity.

Adding an egg to the bread represents rebirth, Christ rising from the dead.

Source: [anitlianinmykitchen.com](http://anitlianinmykitchen.com), [ukranianpeople.us](http://ukranianpeople.us)

**Paska** – This large, round loaf of white bread is elaborately decorated with a braided cross and many rosettes. It symbolizes the joy of the new life given to us by Jesus Christ

- **Ingredients**

- 2 packages (1/4 ounce each) active dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon plus 1/3 cup sugar, divided
- 4 cups warm water (110° to 115°), divided
- 1 cup nonfat dry milk powder
- 13-1/2 to 14-1/2 cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 6 large eggs, room temperature, beaten
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon salt
- **egg glaze:**
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons water



- **Directions**

- In a large bowl, dissolve yeast and 1 teaspoon sugar in 1 cup warm water. Let stand for 5 minutes. Add remaining water. Beat in the milk powder and 5 cups flour until smooth. Cover and let rise in a warm place until bubbly, about 20 minutes. Add eggs, butter, salt and remaining sugar; mix well. Stir in enough remaining flour to form a soft dough. Turn onto a floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic, about 8-10 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1 hour.
- Punch dough down. Turn onto a lightly floured surface; divide in half and set 1 portion aside. Divide remaining portion in half; press each portion into a well-greased 10-in. springform pan. Divide reserved dough into 6 balls. Shape each ball into a 30-in. rope; make 2 braids of 3 ropes each. Place a braid around the edge of each pan, forming a circle. Trim ends of braids, reserving dough scraps. Pinch ends of braids to seal. Shape scraps into 2 long thin ropes; form into rosettes or crosses. Place 1 decoration on the center of each loaf. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour.
- In a small bowl, beat egg and water; brush over dough. Bake at 350° for 50-60 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from pans to wire racks to cool.



Come paint a glorious Sunflower Painting at the Walk In Art Center and help the Ukrainian humanitarian relief efforts via Save the Children! Join artist Heather Butler for a paint and sip class and all proceeds will benefit the children and families displaced in Ukraine. All supplies are included to create your own unique 16x20 sunflower field. Creativity is strongly encouraged. Bring your drink of choice, grab a friend, and come on in for a great time!



Where: Walk In Art Center , 3rd floor gallery  
When: Sunday March 20, 2022, 1pm

**Get Tickets!**

## Why a Newsletter?

Thank you for reading the Folk Art Alliance's seasonal newsletter! This newsletter's purpose is to spark community engagement, communication, and collaboration. Here we will update you on happenings in the world of folk arts in your region, spotlight local artists, and share stories. This newsletter is for folk artists and folk fans alike.

If you would like to contribute content please get in touch at [folklorist@walkinartcenter.com](mailto:folklorist@walkinartcenter.com).



*Building stronger communities takes creativity.*