

# RUSTIC ART IN LANCASTER COUNTY.

---

It affords me pleasure to exhibit to the Lancaster County Historical Society certain broadsides and specimens of early pen-work, which represent a type of art that has almost, if not entirely, passed away.

The history of the fine arts, we know, has been minutely studied. It has, indeed, come to be regarded as essential to higher culture, and there are many people everywhere who are familiar with the masterpieces of American art. There is, however, a variety of ornamental work, which, though rude and primitive and hardly deserving the name of art, is, in its own way, interesting and characteristic of the people that produced it. It is generally local in its character, and it is not difficult to determine the place and people that produced it. There are emblems—floral decorations—which appear so frequently that they have become, in a certain sense, the exclusive property of an age and race. Have you ever carefully examined the wonderful wood-carvings that adorned our oldest churches and private residences? What marvelous wreaths and festoons are there—carvings that are almost detached from their background, and yet have remained immovable for more than a century. The superficial observer might call the work Chipperdale, but, after a moment's consideration, he would probably add: "There is a good deal of Rococo in it, too." Finally, he would come to the conclusion that it contains certain original elements which render it worthy of study as a separate and peculiar style.

Traces of this variety of ornament may be found in many places. You will find it on old pottery, and even on stove-plates. On old tombstones you will recognize it by the chubby cherubs that sustain the conventional hour-glass. Most frequently it may be observed on baptismal certificates and on the curiously printed broadsides which our fathers circulated as aids to devotion.

That this style of art was originally brought from Germany goes without saying. It was there rather contemptuously called Bauerr Kunst, that is, "Peasant Art." Long before the period of the great migration it was usual for country schoolmasters to cultivate a style of calligraphy, resembling print, which was known as Frakturschrift. Many a rural pedagogue no doubt added a trifle to his income by writing certificates of baptism, adorned with flowers, painted in brilliant hues. No doubt, among the earliest immigrants there were some who had mastered this art, but in this country it was greatly developed by the celebrated writing school, which was held in the cloister at Ephrata. As is well known, the sisters produced elaborate pen-drawings which almost deserve to be recognized as works of art.

In early days there was a class of vagrants—not tramps in the modern sense—who traveled from place to place, everywhere claiming and receiving hospitality. Many of these were not uneducated; they may have been schoolmasters in the Fatherland, but were unable to accommodate themselves to new conditions. They were not common beggars, but did not hesitate to accept an occasional gratuity. Many of them had cultivated the art of ornamental writing, and when they had enjoyed a farmer's hospitality they endeavored to reciprocate by presenting to some member of the family a

specimen of their work. No doubt they convinced themselves that they had in this way actually paid for their entertainment. Sometimes it was a manuscript hymn, with some slight marginal adornment. Again, it may have been slyly prepared at the suggestion of one of the younger members of the family to be used as a token of affection—possibly a valentine. Of this character is evidently one of the papers which I have the honor to present. It represents a heart, surmounted by a red flower, probably a tulip, and two buds. On the heart is neatly written a passage from the Song of Solomon—"I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons."

Among the papers thus prepared baptismal certificates were naturally most important. As these were rarely, if ever, signed by the officiating clergyman, they can hardly be regarded as official. They were rather to be preserved as memorials of the sacrament, and were in many instances elaborately ornamented. One of those which are here exhibited manifests considerable skill. It represents on the right a lady, somewhat brilliantly attired, pointing to a bird with brilliant plumage. On the left is a vase supporting flowers, among which the tulip is most conspicuous. The inscription, written in colors, reads as follows: "Barbara Ramberger bin ich genaunt, im Himmel ist mein Vaterland, in Leacock taunschip, Lancaster county, in Staat Pennsylvania, im Jahre unseres Herrn, 1801, den 24 ten January, bin ich gebohren, eine Schulerin auserkohren. Gott gebe mir viel gluck und segen, und fuhre mich auf seinen Wegen, und bringe mich nach dieser Zeit in eine frohe seligkeit."

When baptismal certificates began to be printed the earlier style was to some extent preserved, but it was far inferior to the hand-work of former days. In fact, nothing can more fully exemplify the decline in artistic feeling which characterized the second quarter of the nineteenth century than the miserable pictures which appear on these certificates. The best specimen which I can exhibit was printed by Samuel Bauman, of Ephrata, but the representations of angels and birds, rudely blotched with color, on the certificates issued by John Ritter & Co., of Reading, can hardly commend our admiration.

In conclusion, permit me to direct your attention to a curious broadside published by Babb & Villée, of Lancaster, about 1826. It is a wood-cut, which claims to represent the ways to eternal life and to eternal destruction. Above is a representation of the New Jerusalem. There are no less than thirty human figures, of which a few find their way to the celestial city; but below is a long procession of soldiers, fiddlers, and other disreputable people who march directly to their final abode, which is depicted in a manner which may be described as fearfully realistic.

It is difficult to describe these works of rustic art; but they give us some idea the taste and artistic skill of a former generation, and are therefore interesting and instructive.

JOSEPH HENRY DUBBS.

Author: Dubbs, J. H. (Joseph Henry), 1838-1910.

Title: Rustic art in Lancaster County / by Joseph Henry Dubbs, LL.D.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Folk art--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County.  
Art, Pennsylvania Dutch.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1902-3

Description: [17]-20 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 7, no. 2 & 3

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.7

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

Institution Name  
Institution Address  
Institution Phone Number  
Institution E-mail Address