



Walnut Acres Foundation News

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The Walnut Acres Copper Kettle

By Catherine Smith, History Committee

In rural central Pennsylvania where Paul and Betty Keene settled, farm families hung large copper pots over outdoor fires during the fall apple harvest to make apple butter the Pennsylvania-German way by helping neighbors make it and swapping recipes. Eventually, when Walnut Acres became an international mail order business, appreciative eaters in the United States, Europe, and Asia enjoyed the Keenes' own recipe for "Apple Essence." ■

In rural central Pennsylvania where Paul and Betty Keene settled, farm families hung large copper pots over outdoor fires during the fall apple harvest to make apple butter. Bushels of dried apple "snits" (or sometimes applesauce) and gallons of apple cider were stirred with wooden paddles as wood was added to the fire for hours or days if necessary to render thick, sweet apple butter. Making apple butter in copper pots over an open fire was not limited to Pennsylvania. Throughout the 1800s and 1900s, people did this in the midwestern and southwestern United States or wherever apples grew and copper pots were made. In the 1500s and 1600s, Amerindians in Canada traded furs to French settlers for the prized copper pots. In India, where Betty Keene grew up, copper cookware and open-fire cooking was common.

According to an inscription on its rim, the Keenes' copper kettle was made by J.P. Schaum, a coppersmith and tinsmith active in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in the latter 1800s. Following his grandfather and father, Schaum apprenticed as a coppersmith, moved to Philadelphia, then returned to Lancaster in 1854 to start his own smithy. Schaum's metal works won awards at the Pennsylvania State Fair, the Franklin Institute, and the Centennial International Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia.

The Keenes bought their kettle at a farm sale. It's common in central Pennsylvania for farm property, equipment, and housewares to be sold at auction when the farm ceases operation. As beginning farmers, the Keenes probably frequented such sales to acquire

needed tools including a large copper pot and tripod for open-fire cooking. Possibly they learned to make apple butter the Pennsylvania-German way by helping neighbors make it and swapping recipes. Eventually, when Walnut Acres became an international mail order business, appreciative eaters in the United States, Europe, and Asia enjoyed the Keenes' own recipe for "Apple Essence." ■



Rim of Keene's kettle

For further reading on copper kettle cooking, see: David Bezayiff, "Copper Apple Butter Kettle." *Baltimore Post-Examiner*, August 18, 2016. Lancaster History archives: <http://lancasterhistory.org>. Referred by Martha Tyzenhouse October 26, 2020

Christine Paddleford (1947). "Friends Tell Friends, and So It Goes, Paul Keene." <https://walnutacresproject.org/news/clementine-paddlefords-1947-feature-on-walnut-acres>. Accessed 10/23/20.

Laurier Turgeon, "The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object." *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Winter, 1997), pp. 1-29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/482899>. Accessed October 23, 2020.