

Early Wills

From Last Will and Testaments from the 1800s

The early wills made by people living in this area were many times written in German. At the request of more recent relatives, Lewis W. Donat translated many of these German wills. Mr. Donat had a discussion with Carl Snyder about creating an historical society in Lynn Township. In 2000 when the historical society became a reality, Lewis W. Donat donated the wills he had translated along with many other documents to the organization that became the Lynn-Heidelberg Historical Society.

The early wills tell us about a lifestyle that we are not familiar with today. One large difference is the way the husband takes care of his wife after he dies, as shown in these excerpts from two wills that are in our Lynn-Heidelberg Historical Society library.

Excerpt from the last will and testament of Fridrich Lutz

Date: September 29, 1823



Notice the way the husband takes care of his wife after he dies, as shown in these will excerpts. The will was signed with an "X", Fridrich Lutz's mark.

... Second. I promise my wife, Catharina, all of the rights that I have in the house and on the land; to have and to do as she wishes for as long as she retains my name or until the youngest child becomes fifteen years old. She shall trade or do business as she pleases, and she will be the mast of all of the children, little and big.

... Everything that I own shall be kept together until the youngest child is fifteen years old.

... If one or the other of my children do not obey their mother, then the child shall not share, and be excluded, from the distribution. If my

wife remains living, then she shall send my children to school to learn to read and write, and then to communion, and then to learn a trade of their choice. I promise my wife, Catharina, that after my youngest child is fifteen years old, she shall have her right to the house; to the room that she wants; a right at the fire; to the cellar, where she can keep her things where she wants to; a right to the first and second floor for her needs; a right to have two cows, Summer and Winter and they shall be fed with his cows, and she shall have the choice of the herd.

... She shall have, twenty bushels of rye, four bushels of wheat; ten bushels of corn; five bushels of buckwheat; the grain to be hauled to the mill, then be returned home again and be placed in storage; ten bushels of potatoes; beets, if it gives any, as many as she wants to take out of the garden as she chooses and when she chooses. A right at the baking oven when she chooses, the wood, as much as she needs, to be placed at the baking oven. The wood to be chopped small for the oven and is to be carried into the room when she wants it; two barrels of good cider, one barrel of white cider, if it gives apples; apples for "schnitzing" and Winter apples as many as she wants. Ten pounds of good hackled flax; five pounds of fine tow; five pounds of coarse tow; six pounds of good wool; two gallons of whiskey; two gallons of rum; four gallons of molasses; twelve pounds of sugar; eight pounds of soap; three gallons of whale oil; one and a half bushels of coarse salt; one half bushel of find salt. A fattened swine, cleaned and along with the innards, to weigh one hundred and fifty pounds; fifty pounds of beef; eight pounds of tallow. Shoes as many as she has use for; two beds and bedsteads; a cupboard with all the dishes; to take of the household goods what she wants and as much as she wants and the house clock.

... She shall also have the right to slaughter chickens when she chooses; to have the eggs, as many as she wants and has use for.

... If she becomes sick or should become bedfast, they must wait on her as is the custom among Christian people.

... If my wife, Catharine, no longer retains my name, then she shall have the sum of fifty pounds, a bed and bedstead, a cow, a spinning wheel, a chest with all of the contents and a chair.

... They must give my wife, Catharina, a horse to ride if she wants to; and, her saddle she shall have for as long as she lives.

Excerpt from the last will and testament of Peter Mayer

Date: October 6, 1828

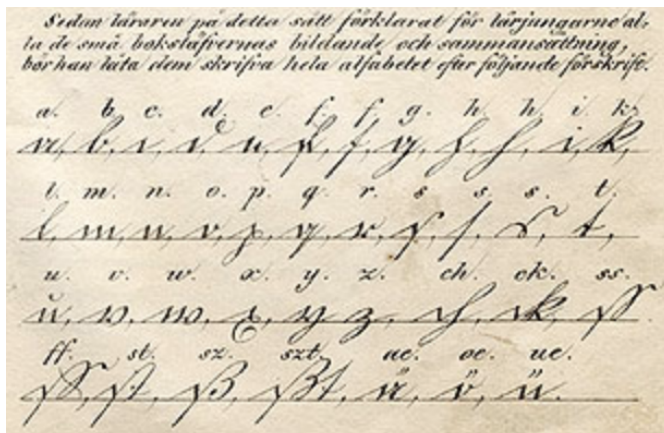
Signed with an "X", the mark of Peter Mayer.

... First I give and bequeath to my housewife, Maria, the lot or tract of land with the house and stable which is presently occupied by my son Benjamin of about two acres, more or less, which is on the left hand side of the road; and also that tract of land to the North on the other side of the road that leads from New Tripoli to Michael Kistler and about five acres, more or less.

... All for so long as she lives in this world or on the condition that she remains my widow and retains my name and no longer.

... Third. I give and bequeath to beloved housewife, Maria, a stove with as much pipe as she needs; the house clock and case; two chairs; two chests; two beds and bedsteads; two iron kettles the copper kettle; a spinning wheel with the reel; a dung fork; a dung hook; two swine; six knives and six forks; six plates; six spoons; all of the cooking ladles and forks; two cows; two cow chains; a wood axe; a spade; all of the flax and tow; the small table; and yearly the lawful interest from one hundred pounds of money, so long as she remains my widow and retains my name and no longer.

... Further, I give and bequeath to be beloved wife, Maria, for three years, each year twenty five bushels of rye or barley which my hereinafter named executors shall give to her out of my estate.



Sütterlin -- the German
handwriting.

About Lewis W. Donat

Lewis W. Donat, 81, of Kempton,
PA, died May 25, 2001. He was
the husband of Margarite

(Shoemaker) Donat, who died in 1995.

He was general manager of WK&S Steam Tourist Railroad, Kempton, for many years before retiring in 1981. Previously, he was a repairman for the former Lycoming Telephone Co., now GTE, in the Allentown-Reading area.

Born in Macungie, he was a son of the late Rev. Harry J. and Ida M. (White) Donat. He was an Army veteran of World War II, serving with the Signal Corps in the Pacific.

He was a genealogist, local historian and expert in an old South German script known as Sütterlin, which was used by Pennsylvania Germans from about 1765 to 1865. More than 500 wills which he translated from Sütterlin into English are on file with Lynn/Heidelberg Historical Society and courthouses in Lehigh, Northampton, Berks and Schuylkill counties.

He was profiled for his work in Morning Call articles in 1990 and 1992 and made an honorary member of Lynn/Heidelberg Historical Society in 1999, when he donated his collection of wills, maps and reference books to the society.