

Roots of Home

OUR JOURNEY TO A NEW OLD HOUSE



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DELAWARE VALLEY

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH FARMHOUSE

"[Pennsylvania] is free for all Persuasions, in a Sober and Civil way; for the Church of England and the Quakers bear equal Share in the Government. They live Friendly and Well together; there is no Persecution for Religion, nor ever like to be."

—GABRIEL THOMAS, *An Account of West Jersey and Pennsylvania* (1698)

Daniel Boone was an American frontier legend who spent his childhood honing his wilderness skills in western Pennsylvania. The son of English Quaker parents, Boone was born in 1734 in a log and stone house in the Oley Valley near Reading. The Boones' neighbors were mostly Germans who had migrated to William Penn's colony to escape years of hardship and failing harvests in the Rhine River Valley. Although called Pennsylvania Dutch, they were not Dutch at all, but *Deutsch*, or Germans.



William Penn's Quaker colony, founded in 1682 on the Delaware River, attracted English Quakers and German Rhinelanders to the fertile farmland in the Schuylkill and Brandywine river valleys.



Peter Zimmerman's new Pennsylvania Dutch stone farmhouse is set among the rolling hills on a Chester County farm that overlooks an old mill stream and a pond. Generations of additions have transformed the house from its humble beginnings as a mill master's homestead.

(below) Made with fieldstones harvested from the nearby creek, the original mill master's house has a pent roof over the door and mortar joints made of coarse river sand and lime troweled flat. This was an ordinary mill building meant to be simple, sturdy, and unpretentious.

In the Pennsylvania Dutch country west of Philadelphia, architect Peter Zimmerman has re-created the classic story of a Quaker-German stone farmhouse. Starting with the strong bones of an 18th-century mill master's house, Zimmerman's new old house tells a tale of additions pieced together over 200 years. United by their common craftsmanship in stone, each part of his design records the subtle evolution of the Pennsylvania Dutch style, from German simplicity to Georgian grace.

WILLIAM PENN'S "HOLY EXPERIMENT"

The rolling hills and dales around Philadelphia, known as Pennsylvania Dutch country, are home to America's richest legacy of early stone farmhouses. At the turn of the 18th century, William Penn's "Holy Experiment"

attracted European peasants by the scores to his promise of religious freedom and fertile farmland in the Schuylkill and Brandywine river valleys. Out of the forests of the Pennsylvania countryside, English Quakers and German Rhinelanders cleared farmsteads and built houses of timber and stone, creating a distinctive Pennsylvania style.

Penn learned about building houses in the New World from Swedish log cabins built in the Delaware Valley and offered this advice to newcomers in a promotional pamphlet of 1684:

"...build then, a House of thirty foot long and eighteen foot broad, with a partition near the middle, and another to divide one end of the House into two small Rooms...with a loft over all....This may seem a mean way of Building but 'tis sufficient and safest for ordinary beginners."

Penn's prescription became the "Quaker Plan" that guided early homebuilders in his colony. As they cleared fields and tilled the rock-strewn soils, Pennsylvania's Quaker and German settlers stockpiled logs and fieldstones for building houses, barns, and outbuildings. Living together as neighbors, their cultures merged over time, weaving traditional English and German patterns of home into the classic Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse.

All the building materials were close at hand, enabling settlers to shape homes that were truly of their place. The first log cabins built on Penn's plan lasted only for a generation before they were replaced by permanent houses of stone. Pennsylvania Germans preferred to build in stone, as their ancestors had done, and they constructed a sturdier home as soon as they could.





Marriage of Quaker and German Traditions

Early Pennsylvania German stone houses often faithfully repeated the traditions of the Rhine Valley, where the common house was an *ernhaus*, also called a *flurkückenhaus*, arranged in three rooms built around a central chimney. In keeping with tradition, roofs were steeply pitched to provide sleeping room and storage in the attic.

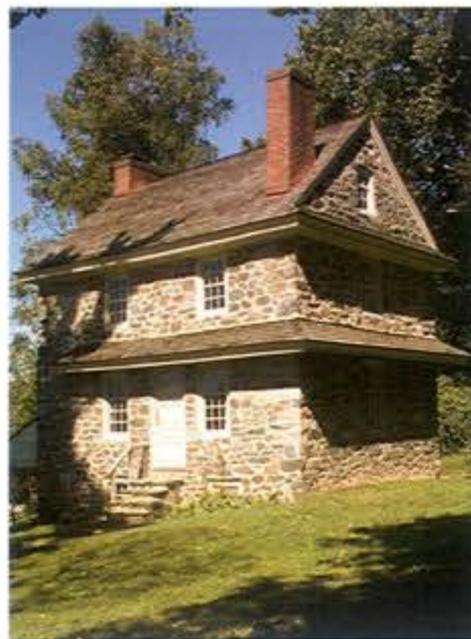
Over time the *ernhaus* plan merged with the architecture of the English Quakers, and the classic Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse was born. English colonial details such as a symmetrical facade, double-hung windows, and paneled wood shutters were combined with German floor plans and pent roofs. Two stories tall and square in plan, the classic house had three bays of windows across the front, an entry door offset to one side, and a chimney on the end wall.

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• ernhaus •

An *ernhaus*, or *flurkückenhaus*, is a traditional German architectural form, the term roughly translating as an “entryway kitchen house.” The three-room plan was arranged around a massive central chimney, the principal room being the *küche*, a combination kitchen and dining room that was the main social space. The rest of the house was divided into two smaller rooms: a *stube*, or stove room, and a *kammer*, or bedchamber for the parents.

With their farmsteads widely spaced across the countryside, Pennsylvania German families were independent and frugal. Architectural details were designed for utility rather than for show, and little attention was paid to decoration. The simple stone walls and lack of ornament bore witness to the values of simplicity and thrift that were shared by Quaker and German farmers.



(opposite page) In the 18th century, influenced by the Georgian style, the Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse became more formal and symmetrical. This change in taste is shown in the Georgian portico and three-bay facade of the new house.

(far left) Pennsylvania Dutch stone walls were laid up in rough courses of fieldstone called rubblework. Heavy hewn oak beams were used to frame floors and roofs, while long hand-split oak shingles covered the roofs.

(left) The curved top and cross-buck bracing of Zimmerman's garden gate cast strong shadows in sunlight. A black iron ball-and-chain weight serves as the gate's latch.