

From Farm to Festival – Apple ‘n Cheese Galore

By Dan Mason

The apples come primarily from two local orchards: Bohlayers and Landon Farms.

The cheese comes from local dairies. Visitors can sample sharp cheddar, Swiss, and pepper jack cheeses among others. There is also apple butter to sample and buy as well as apple pies made by local residents.

“And then there is the famous Apple Dumpling Gang from the East Canton church,” says Marcie Shinn, who handles the Fine Arts and Photography portion of the Pennsylvania Apple ‘n Cheese Festival. “People drive for hundreds of miles just to have one of these dumplings. They will be making 4,000 homemade apple dumplings to be sold in their booth on Saturday, and, if any are left, from noon until gone on Sunday.”

If you want an apple dumpling, you’ll have to beat out 20,000 other people, the average annual attendance at The Pennsylvania Apple ‘n Cheese Festival, to be held October 4 and 5 this year.

There’s plenty more than apple and cheese. Visitors can also see chainsaw carving, glass blowing, weaving, broom-making, and blacksmithing demonstrations. There is an antique tractor exhibition and a fine arts and photography show. “Last year we had more than 200 entries,” Shinn said. “Thanks to our sponsors, we awarded more than \$2000 in prizes.”

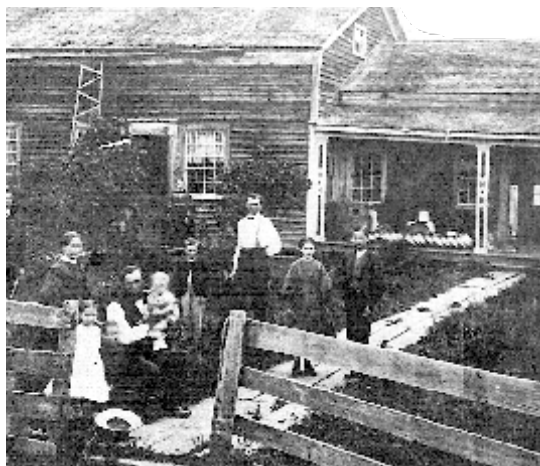
Younger visitors can spend time lost in a hay maze, decorate pumpkins, or tap their feet in time with Scott Smith, a local musician who specializes in folk music.

There’s a lot to eat. “More food and craft vendors attend the festival each year,” Shinn said. “Last year we had about forty food vendors and almost 100 craft vendors.”

The local event has become a classic and an important support for good causes. “The festival is one of the largest fund raisers for many local organizations,” Shinn said. With help from Representative Matt Baker, the Apple ‘n Cheese Festival was recognized in Harrisburg as the official Pennsylvania Apple ‘n Cheese Festival in 1999.

It all started with Rekindle the Spirit Inc., a nonprofit organization founded in 1988 as the Apple ‘n Cheese Festival Committee. “A group of local people wanted to do something to improve the local economy,” Shinn said.

The festival started in a volunteer fireman’s field with 1,500 visitors. It remained in that location for ten years and experienced steady growth. More food vendors applied for licenses. More craftspeople signed up to demonstrate their skills. More people showed up to nibble cheese and sample homemade apple pies, dumplings, and butter. By the late 1990s the Apple ‘n Cheese Festival had outgrown its original home.



The original Manley farmhouse (above) and how it looks today (right).

Now the festival is held at the Manley-Bohlayer farm on the first full weekend of October each year. The Manley-Bohlayer farm is one of the oldest farms in the area. Thomas S. Manley bought the Valley Farm circa 1860. “It must have been an established farm to be called Valley Farm when Thomas Manley bought it,” Shinn said.

When Thomas and Lucy Manley first bought the farm, “The first house was kind of a shack,” Shinn said. Manley family lore reveals that Lucy was willing to live in the shack, but she expected Thomas not to leave her there forever. “I will live in the house as long as you say,” Lucy told Thomas, according to family oral tradition, “but we will not put any money into it.”

Thomas built a Victorian house in the 1870s with more than thirty rooms for his huge family. Later “the left rear two-story portion of the house was cut off and moved about 300 feet to the south for use by a hired man,” according to Philip Preston, a great-grandson of Thomas Manley.

Manley left the farm to his youngest son Joel Manley in 1904. Joel was an innovator. He brought the first sickle-bar mower to the area, and his dairy herd was the first in the area to be tested tuberculosis-free. Joel Manley sold the farm to a distant relative in the 1920s, when poor health made working on the farm impossible. The farm stayed in the Manley family until it was lost to a bank during the depression.

Enter Franklin Bohlayer. Bohlayer bought the farm in 1935 and worked it until his death in 1987, whereupon his only daughter, Sylvia Bohlayer, took over its operations. She worked the farm for ten years.

Jeff and Angie Sechrist bought the farm in 1998 and sold thirteen acres to Rekindle the Spirit in



A sea of canopies for artisans and vendors spreads out over the Manley-Bohlayer farm near Canton in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, during the annual Apple ‘n Cheese Festival held the first full weekend in October.

1999. The thirteen-acre piece of the Manley-Bohlayer Farm is large enough that it became permanent home of the Pennsylvania Apple ‘n Cheese Festival.

Along with the fifteen-room farmhouse, there is a horse barn, a machinery shed, a chicken coop, and a corncrib. Rekindle the Spirit is in the process of moving the donated Hoagland School, a century-old one-room school house, from the East Canton area to the farm. Plans include building a pavilion to house a cider press, which they are in the process of rebuilding.

Williamsport resident Dan Mason teaches journalism at Mansfield University in Mansfield, PA.

WHAT: Pennsylvania Apple ‘n Cheese Festival
WHEN: Saturday, October 4, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Sunday October 5, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
WHERE: Canton, PA
INFORMATION: 570-673-7222
www.paapplecheese.com
www.rekindlethespirit.com

