

# PANNEBAKKER FAMILY NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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## William Penn visits the Indians

Ever wonder what Pennsylvania was like when the first Pannebakkers arrived?

Excerpts quoted from Samuel Janney's *Life of William Penn*, 6th edition, 1882.

In the spring of 1683, William Penn made a journey to the interior of his province, during which he made himself fully acquainted with its surface, soil, and natural productions and visited the Indians in their wigwams, with whom he learned to converse in their own language. The result of his observations is communicated in the following interesting letter to the Free Society of Traders.

For the province, the general condition of it take as followeth:

The country itself, its soil, air, waters and seasons, produce both natural and artificial, are not to be despised. The land containeth divers sorts of earth, as sand, yellow and black, poor and rich; also gravel, both loamy and dusty; and in some places a fast, fat earth, like that of our best vales in England, especially by inland brooks and rivers. God in his wisdom having ordered it so, that the advantages of the country are divided; the back lands being generally three to one richer than those that lie by navigable rivers. We have much of another soil, and that is a black hazel mould upon a stony or rocky bottom.

The natural produce of the country, of vegetables, is trees, fruits, plants and flowers. The trees of most note are the black walnut, cedar, cypress, chestnut, poplar, gum-wood, hickory, sassafras, ash, beech, and oak of divers sort, as red, white and black; Spanish chestnut, and swamp, the most durable of all; of all which there is plenty for use of man.

The fruits I find in the woods are the white and black mulberry, chestnut, walnut, plums, strawberries, cranberries, hurtleberries, and grapes of divers sorts. Here are also peaches very good, and in great quantities, not an Indian plantation without them; but whether naturally here at first I know not.

The artificial produce of the country is wheat, barley, oats, rye, peas, beans, squashes, pumpkins, water melons, musk-melons, and all herbs and roots that our gardens in England usually bring forth.

Of living creatures, fish, fowl, and the beasts of the wood, here are divers sorts, some for food and profit, and some for profit only: for food as well as profit, the elk, as big as a small ox, deer, bigger than ours; beaver, raccoon, rabbits, squirrels; and some eat young bear and commend it. Of fowl of the land there is the turkey, (forty and fifty pounds weight) which is very great, pheasants, heath-birds, pigeons, and partridges in abundance. Of the water, the swan, goose, (white and gray,) brands, ducks, teal, also the snipe and curloe, and that in great numbers, but the duck and teal excel, nor so good have

I ever eaten in other countries. Of fish there is the sturgeon, herring, rock, shad, cat's-head, sheep's-head, eel, smelt, perch, roach; and in inland rivers trout, some say salmon above the Falls. Of shell-fish, we have oysters, crabs,

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cockles, conchs, and muscles; some oysters six inches long, and one sort of cockles as big as the stewing oysters: they make a rich broth.

The creatures for profit only, by skin or fur, and which are natural to these parts, are the wild cat, panther, otter, wolf, fox, fisher, minx, muskrat; and of the water, the whale for oil, of which we have a good store.

We have no want of horses, and some are very good and shapely enough. Two ships have been freighted to Barbadoes, with horses and pipe-staves, since my coming in. Here is also plenty of cow-cattle and some sheep. The people plough mostly with oxen.

There are divers plants, which not only the Indians tell us, but we have had occasion to prove, by swellings, burnings, and cuts, that they are of great virtue, suddenly curing the patient; and for smell, I have observed several, especially one, the wild myrtle, the other I know not what to call, but they are most fragrant.

The woods are adorned with lovely flowers for colour, greatness, figure, and variety. I have seen the gardens of London best stored with that sort of beauty, but think they may be improved by our woods. I have sent a few to a person of quality this year for a trial. Thus much of the country: next, of the natives or aborigines..

Submitted by: Ron Pennypacker

Penn's observations on the Indians, next time.

## REUNION 2019

Planning for the reunion has gotten off to a good start. The Steering Committee met for the first time on February 24, at the home of Bruce and Sandy Pennypacker. The committee is made up of members of PFA and all are more-or-less within driving distance of Pennypacker Mills. There are also a few members scattered around the country who have given input.

The main objective at our first meeting was to pick a date and format for the reunion. The committee, after considering responses from the questionnaire sent to all PFA members, decided on July 5-7, 2019. The reunion will consist of registration and a reception at the host hotel on Friday evening, July 5. On Saturday, there will be tours of significant historical sites, cemeteries, churches, etc. in the Montgomery County area, followed by a picnic at Pennypacker Mills. On Sunday, there will be a luncheon and break-out meetings on various topics. The specifics of the above events are yet to be worked out.

Additional information, as it becomes available, will be listed on our Facebook page (**Pannebakker Family Reunion 2019**). Please join our Facebook group.

## 2018 Dues

Our dues cycle runs from May 1 to April 30 each year. Dues for 2018 can be paid now and are due before April 30, 2018. We have a new dues structure:

Individual membership: one year - \$15, three years - \$40

Husband and wife membership: one year - \$20, three years - \$50

As you can see, we've added the option of paying for three years with a savings of \$5 for individuals and \$10 for a husband and wife. As always, those who have reached the age of 80 are dues free.

## The Forgotten History Of Fat Men's Clubs

Tanya Basu

In 1903, in a cheery local tavern tucked away in Wells River, Vt., one of America's most successful fat men's clubs was launched.

"We're fat and we're making the most of it!" was their mantra. "I've got to be good-natured; I can't fight and I can't run," was their motto. Members had to be at least 200 pounds, pay a \$1 fee to enter and learn a secret handshake and password. Twice a year, members gathered, with meetings announced in advance to allow the men to stuff up in order to meet the minimum weight requirement. A 1904 *Boston Globe* article described the biannual meetings colorfully:

"This village is full of bulbous and overhanging abdomens and double chins tonight, for the New England Fat Men's Club is in session at Hale's Tavern. The natives, who are mostly bony and angular, have stared with envy at the portly forms and rubicund faces which have arrived on every train."

The fat men's clubs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were spectacular celebrations of the wealth and chubbiness of a bygone era. At once sociological curiosity and anthropological artifact, these clubs were a vestige of perhaps the last time society found corpulence to be worthy of celebration. Weigh-ins were a competitive event. A *New York Times* article from 1885 describes the crestfallen reaction of a member of a Connecticut fat men's club upon stepping on the scale. "I must weigh over 300 pounds now," George Kapp boasted. Alas, he came in at a disappointing 243. As the *Times* reported, "His friends thought he shrank at least 20 pounds more from grief before evening."

Daryl Leeworthy, a historian at the U.K.'s Swansea University, says that fat men's clubs weren't just an East Coast phenomenon. Nevada, Utah and Tennessee boasted versions as well. And he says the clubs weren't just venues to celebrate the joys of eating without concern and brag about one's girth. They were, essentially, networking events. Memphis' fat men's baseball club had a reception committee replete with judges, ministers and a rabbi, he says. Populist Democrat William Jennings Bryan traveled to a Fat Men's Club in Concord, Mass., to drum up support for one of his presidential runs, Leeworthy says.

What did one do at a fat men's club gathering? Well, eat, of course — a lot. At its peak, the New England's Fat Men's Club had 10,000 members, according to writer Polly Tafrate's brief history of the club for *Upper Valley Life*. The men would cram huge breakfasts into their bellies, then stumble outside and work up a sweat in a friendly Olympics-style competition showcasing strength and virility: leap-frog contests, broad jumps and races, Tafrate writes.

The exertion also served to jump-start appetite for the indulgent dinner spread that awaited members at sundown. It was a ridiculous amount of food, Tafrate writes:

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"One nine-course menu included oyster cocktail, cream of chicken soup, boiled snapper, fillet of beef with mushrooms, roast chicken, roast suckling pig, shrimp salad, steamed fruit pudding with brandy sauce, assorted cakes, cheese and ice cream followed by coffee and cigars. The evening was laced with large portions of wit, sarcasm and roaring laughter."

Even at the height of chubby chic, being grossly, morbidly obese was never celebrated as a sign of beauty and wealth, explains Peter Stearns, a professor of history at George Mason University and author of *Fat History*. He notes that, while having wide hips and some girth was considered attractive for a woman — indicating her prosperity and fertility — "fat ladies" were often mocked and included as a freak show element in traveling circuses. Fat men weren't similarly lampooned, though they, too, faced ridicule: Tafrate's article mentions a child exclaiming: "Gee, look at that stomach! Let's get under it and keep out of the rain!"

However, female versions of fat men's clubs *did* exist, according to Leeworthy. He points to a Hazleton, Pa. venue whose female members weighed 236 pounds on average. But Leeworthy says the opposite — fat women's reduction clubs — were far more common.

"One of these existed in Chicago just after the First World War and aimed at promoting responsible diet among the city's overweight women," Leeworthy told us in an email. "Even in the 19th century, diet pills (sometimes known as 'obesity pills') were advertised. ... In a world where power and status mattered a great deal, this was yet another reminder that women tended to have neither."

Fat men's clubs were not a uniquely American phenomenon, though they were more popular here than elsewhere, Leeworthy adds. There was a French version — *Les Cents Kilos*, or "The Hundred Kilos" — formed in 1897 that didn't quite take off. The Serbian capital of Belgrade created a version in 1932. He says Britain's version of the club had a twist: Members who didn't meet the weight requirement had to pay a fine, which was donated to charity.

Throughout history, there have been wavering ideas about ideal body type. As Leeworthy notes: "Traditionally, being fat was closely associated with wealth and status. For most of our ancestors, the poorer they were, the less food they had to eat, and the thinner and shorter they tended to be. And power and wealth and status are attractive characteristics: If a person's body is their temple, then being the size of a cathedral told others that you were someone of significance."

But as the Industrial Revolution began to change the way we worked and ate, views about fat and health also began to shift. "An increasing number of people had jobs that weren't physically demanding," Stearns notes. And the advent of modern agricultural methods made food supply more reliable. "For the bulk of the middle class, the pendulum began to swing," he says. In other words, people were expending less energy and were more confident about getting a meal.

In some ways, fat men's clubs were a last hurrah for celebrations of corpulence. As Stearns writes in *Fat History*, "In general, in a trend that began around 1910, doctors and insurance actuaries began to push preferability of underweight to overweight, in terms of health and longevity."

Being fat was no longer so feted. Membership at fat men's clubs began to dwindle, as did waistlines. For instance, at the last meeting of the New England Fat Men's Club, in 1924, only 38 members showed up, none of whom met the 200-pound mark, Tafrate reports.

Today, body image faces a new chapter. Gone are Twiggy-inspired skinny legs; a line of curvy, more realistic Barbies reflects actual bodies. Thigh gaps, hot dog legs and waist trainers, while still a part of the popular lexicon, are criticized for promoting unhealthy body images. While it's unlikely that fat men's clubs will ever catch on again, current trends toward body acceptance might yet nudge us toward that Goldilocks level of body image: not too fat, not too thin, just plain healthy.

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# *Pannebakker Family Association*



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."