

Why We Celebrate

This local tradition has been observed in the Juniata River Valley for over two centuries, carried here by an early local settler. Legend has it that if you eat goose on Michaelmas Day, you will never want for money all the year round.

Believers of this tradition adhere faithfully to this tradition and eat goose every September 29th, St. Michaelmas Day thus ensuring wealth and prosperity for the coming year. In the 1970's, both the Mifflin & Juniata County Commissioners issued formal proclamations establishing Goose Day as official county holidays.

Generations of families in Mifflin and Juniata Counties have celebrated Goose Day with a dinner featuring the lucky bird. Recently, we have been encouraging everyone to look for creative ways to celebrate Goose Day.

Businesses, nonprofit groups, individuals and community organizations are stepping up to build our local holiday into something bigger.

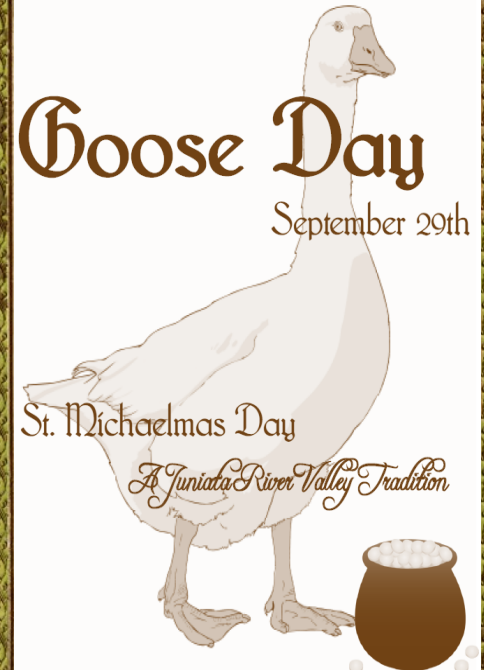
If you'd like to add an activity to next year's list, contact the Juniata River Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, 717-248-6713, info@juniatarivervalley.org

For more information about the wide variety of activities, events, and promotions held throughout the Juniata River Valley for Goose Day and year round, go to www.juniatarivervalley.org. Goose Day updates are made each year on September 1st.



Goose Day

September 29th



The Legend

Interesting Facts

- ◆ *St. Michaelmas Day was first declared a festival by Pope Gelasius in the year AD 487.*
- ◆ *The association with geese arises with Queen Elizabeth I as she was eating goose on this day in 1588 when she received news of the defeat of the Spanish Armada.*
- ◆ *The Amish celebrate St. Michaelmas Day by closing their businesses and not working in their fields. It is a day of resting and fasting. In the past many of them were tenant farmers in Europe and a percent of their profits were paid to the landholder every year on this day.*
- ◆ *In Ireland, women would gather St. Michael's wild carrots. They were then tied into bunches with red thread and given as gifts to visitors on St. Michaelmas Day. On Michaelmas Eve, it was a custom to "borrow" a neighbor's horse, wherever found and by whatever means. Horse owners and borrowers tried to outwit each other, but it was always obligatory to leave one horse so the owner and his wife could attend the next day's festivities. In any event, the stolen horses were always returned the next day.*

The History of Goose Day in the Juniata River Valley

It all started in 1786 when a Pennsylvania Dutchman named Andrew Pontius moved his family to Snyder County to farm. His farm prospered and he hired a tenant farmer to help. On his way to Lancaster to hire a German immigrant, he stopped in Harrisburg for the night where he met a young Englishman named Archibald Hunter. Hunter told Pontius that he'd jumped ship while the British fleet was docked in Philadelphia and that he was working his way west.

Impressed with the youth, Pontius dropped his original plan and offered Hunter the job. He accepted and the two drew up a contract which included a clause specifying that their accounts were to be settled each year on the traditional day to do so, September 29th.

On that day, Hunter appeared at Pontius's door with accounts under one arm and a goose under the other. The tenant explained to his wondering landlord that in England, eating a goose on the Fest of St. Michael, patron saint of soldiers and protectors, would bring good luck. Since Medieval times, accounts in England had been settled, contacts renewed, and rents paid on Michaelmas Day. A goose was an expected payment since they were at their prime. Legend has it that a slice of goose breast could predict the winter to come.

If the meat was dark, the winter would be severe; if light and dark, variable, if fair, the sun was predicted to shine much. Pontius, his family, and Hunter followed this custom.

Hunter also introduced a second English tradition. Anna Snyder, Pontius' niece, was visiting that first Goose Day when Hunter appeared with the goose. She overheard the man say that a special Michaelmas treat was a cake with a gold ring stirred into the batter. The lucky one who found it could expect an early marriage.

Anna, a romantic girl, persuaded her uncle to include a Michaelmas cake as dessert. While the men settled their accounts, Anna and her aunt prepared the goose and baked the cake. According to the story Anna found the ring and she and Hunter were soon married. Her uncle Andrew felt that he had struck an exceptionally good bargain that day when he met the Englishman.

The people of the Juniata River Valley continue to celebrate Goose Day by dining on goose and by enjoying a wide variety of events and activities held all over our two county area. We encourage you to check our website starting every September 1 to find the newest list of things to do: www.juniatarivervalley.org