

Artisan Bread Baking

At the circa 1751 Peter Burr House

Notes: From the old website: <http://www.shannondaleclubalumni.org/burrpages/breadbake4-2005/1.htm>, The following was copied and re-formatted. Notes are added and will appear in red italics. The following pictures were taken on April 16, 2005; numerous changes have occurred since that date. As you look at the house, note that it was constructed in 3 different time periods. The tallest section was built about 1751. It contained 2 rooms downstairs and 2 rooms upstairs and was built similar to medieval architecture. This house has interested several architects today. Both sides of each beam in the ceilings (of the two downstairs rooms) have been beaded, and a chair rail goes around all walls downstairs (in the 2 eastern original rooms). These special touches of class (in a somewhat wilderness land) evidenced the fact that the Burrs were accustomed to quality workmanship. Later the second (far left) section of the house is believed to have been built and the middle section was a breezeway between the 2 buildings. The open section is believed to have been enclosed later, and the 2 separate sections were joined into one house.

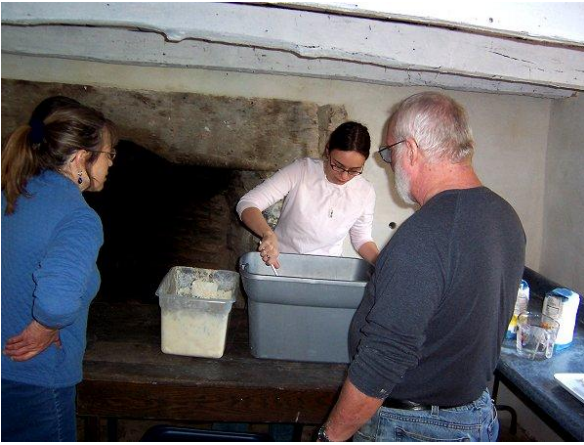
I have walked on the wooden floors my ancestors built by hand and looked into the 2 large fireplaces for which they placed each stone. I've walked on the path around the house where I suspect 13 sets of little Burr feet ran barefooted for a number of years. I've picked a leaf from the big old silver maple at the corner of the house where I wonder if our ancestors might have planted it a long time ago. I've been in the rooms where Peter Burr restrained his life-style to that of a yeoman farmer, disallowed from holding public office (as did his ancestors before him), because he was not a member of the Church of England. I've been in the room where he was found dead with his Bible open before him as though he had been reading it when he died suddenly. Each time I visit this house, I am aware that I share the same DNA as those who lived, worked, and played around this house 250 years ago. This house is an appropriate setting to tell the earliest history of the local area. Text appearing in red are comments made in 2006 by Joyce Cole (a descendant of Peter Burr).

The Peter Burr House



The Peter Burr house is located in the eponymously named Burr Industrial Park just north of the T. A. Lowery Elementary School on State Route 9. This unassuming structure is the oldest standing wood framed structure in the State of West Virginia. Not the second most or the almost but **THE OLDEST**. It has been saved thru the efforts of the Friends of Peter Burr under the aegis of the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission.

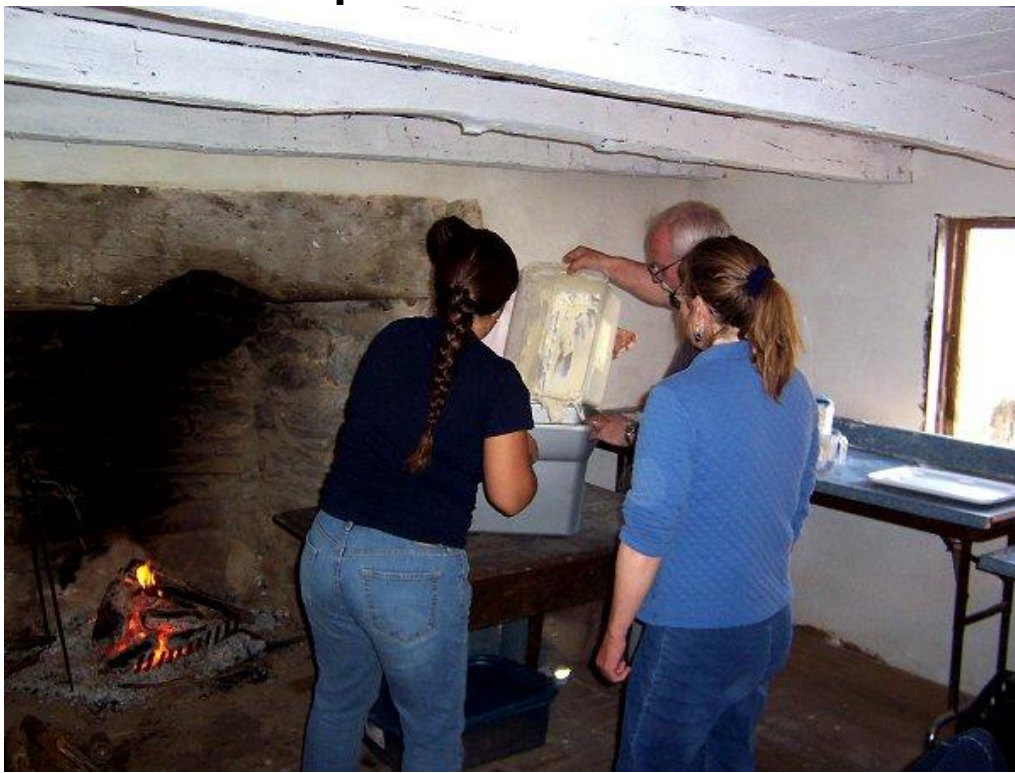
What is Artisan Bread?



Artisan bread is made with a fresh leaven (yeast) and uses flour, salt and water as its basic ingredients. These are mixed by hand and baked in a masonry oven with a domed shape (cloche). We see Bill Theriault, the master baker, instructing a student from Shepherd University on preparing the ingredients into a workable dough. With the exception of a few modern utensils (plastic containers, Pyrex measuring cups, etc.) the process is just as the Burr family might have performed the task on a baking day.

Mixing of the bread (at the time the picture was taken) took place in the back room near the small fireplace. The beading on both sides of all beams is present but not visible due to the quality of the picture.

Preparation Continues



Peter Burr fathered 13 children and outlived two wives in his lifetime. A family as large as his plus the indentured servants and hired hands necessary to work his 800 acre farm would have required far more baked goods than the home's two fireplaces were equipped to produce.

Notice the size of the fireplace, and this is the smaller one in the room that now is the back room but that originally was the front room. Notice the north-facing window that overlooks a small front porch that is not visible in any of these pictures..

This ISN'T "Playdough"

Our three stalwart apprentices will tell you that working with the dough is no mean task. It's kneaded for about 20 minutes and allowed to rise for several hours before shaping and letting it rise again.



This is HARD work

Our workers will probably not wonder why bakers of artisan bread had broad shoulders and strong arms. We heard a comment that time had never seemed to pass so slowly as that which was needed to knead!



Like Proud Parents Displaying Bambinos...

...our bakers show off their dough, another variation of "Show Me the Money". The balls of this dough are headed to the proofing chamber for the initial rising.



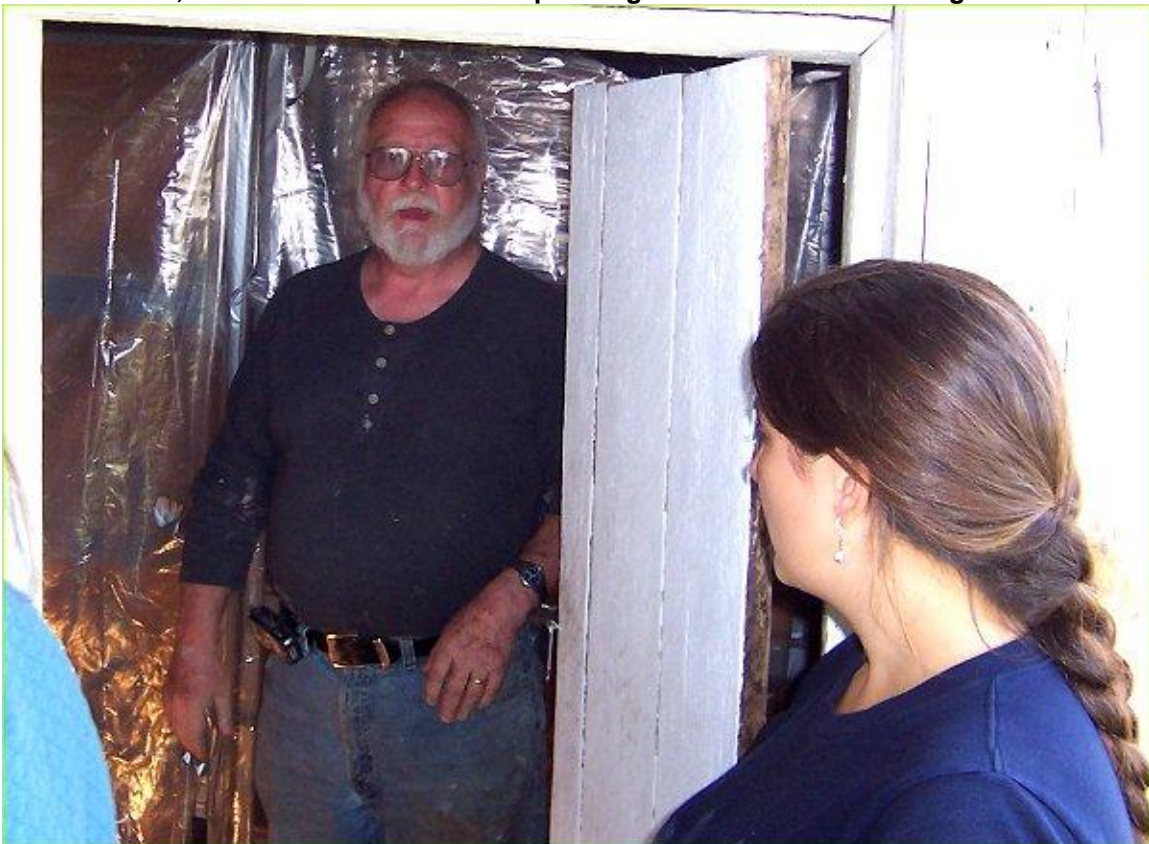
We'll Take Some Liberty with Historical Accuracy...

...when using plasticware in which to place portioned dough to rise. The cloth covers will prevent drying of the product.



Master Baker Theriault Shows Us Proof

Or rather, Mr. Theriault shows us the proofing chamber where the dough will rise.



Dr. Bill Theriault is a retired professor of English Literature who taught for years at the prestigious George Washington University in Washington DC. He also is the visionary who shared the original vision for preserving the Peter Burr House for the sake of history and is the person who had the passion to stick with it for more than 15 years through the slow process of building community interest and raising funds for the project. Yet, he is quiet and appears somewhat in the background. To meet him, no one would ever know he is a very learned and highly respected educator.

Rising to the Occasion

Bill Theriault explains the portioning of the once risen dough (it sure looks bigger) and the shaping into various types of loaves (some shapes seen [HERE](#)). Today Bill will be measuring out dough for boule shaped loaves.

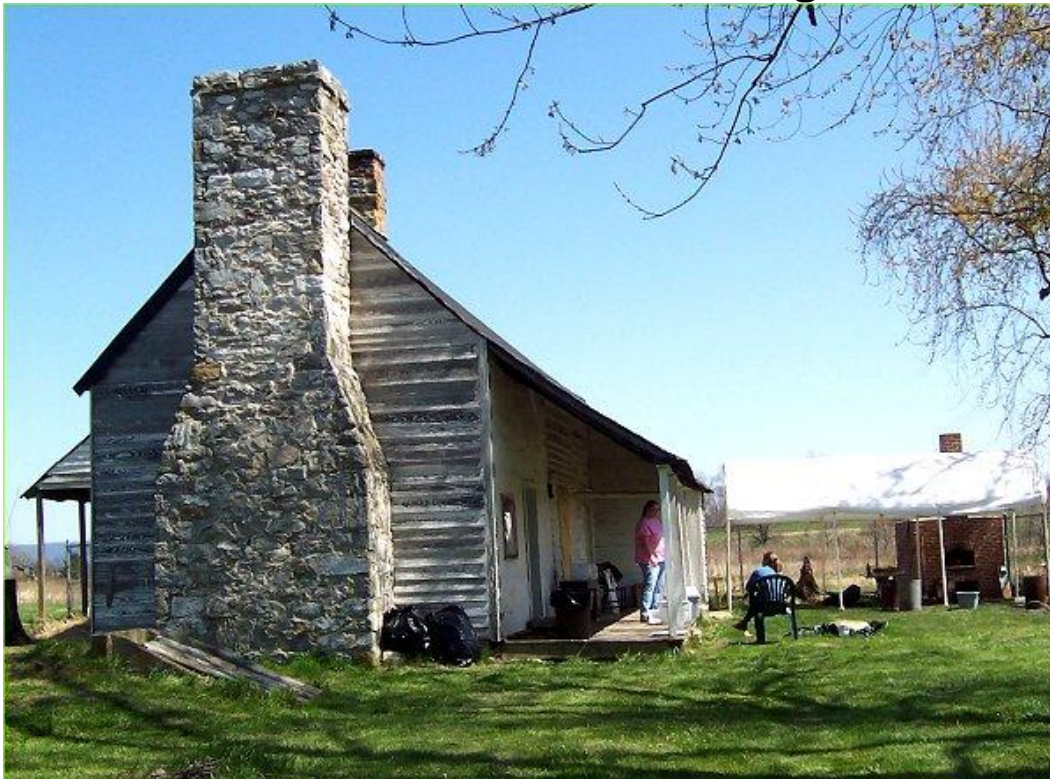


Emily Supervises While...

...Jane and Kathryn do the work, shaping the dough into Boules for the second rising. The future loaves will be placed in the plastic containers we saw in an earlier frame and proofed again prior to baking. The work is easier (particularly for Em) but trickier to get the proper shape.



The Oven Awaits the Dough



We'll editorialize for a moment. *"What a glorious day to observe this process."* That said, it's back to the baking. The oven isn't operated like the one at home. The chamber is heated to temperature with a wood fire and the ashes are then scraped to clear out the chamber. The mass of the masonry retains the heat long enough to bake the bread. As it cools the chamber would have been used to prepare more delicate goods like cake and pastry on Bake Day.

Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble



Ok, ok, none of Shakespeare's witches here and certainly no cauldron. But, there will be bubbles, and we'll get to that later. Another touch of the modern day is the high temperature thermometer on the right to insure the oven has reached proper temperature. The inside of the cloche oven can be seen in the drawing on the website. Once the oven has reached proper temperature, the chamber is cleared of any remains of the burn in preparation to receive the unbaked loaves. The thick walls of the masonry heat chamber retain adequate heat to ensure a superb product.

Bread in the days of the Peter Burr family was more of a substantial part of the meal than it is today. It was called sustenance for a reason and the term "breaking bread" makes much more sense as one tries to cut one of the loaves of hard-crust bread. Bread was made from whole grains with dried fruits (raisins, cherries) and flavorful as well as nutritious herbs. One loaf would feed about two people per day. With a mother and father and 13 children, the family alone (not counting workers and possible guests) would need about 7 loaves of bread a day. Bread baking probably occurred once a week due to the number of loaves needed and the lack of refrigeration for preserving the loaves. The brick oven bakes approximately 24 loaves at a time and would have done the same in earlier times when so much bread was needed.

The oven would have been outside, and it had to be large. The one above was recently constructed at the Peter Burr House and was built according to documentation of how ovens were constructed in the days when the house was built. Herbs and fruits used in the breads are often grown in the Jane Burr Kitchen Garden a short distance from what is now the back of the house. The size and texture of the bread is affected by the weather (temperature and humidity). Warmth is needed for the rising process, and cold weather in an unheated house does not produce bread of a quality for resale.

The artesian bread is currently baked for sale and for living history demonstration one Saturday per month from April through October. The Burrs most likely baked during winter months also but so many people living together in such a small house may have contributed to more interior warmth for prepping than the empty house today. They also would have had the tools and utensils most appropriate for the task. The bread is sold through advance orders and includes specialty breads such as olive loaf and others. The money raised from the bread baking is determined by the bread bakers and has gone toward the archaeology of the property; restoration of the house: and for the educational program. Fourth grade students from the county's schools visit the farm and enjoy the educational value that has been planned around their age-appropriate curriculum.

The view of the house normally seen as the front is believed to be the original back of the house. When the railroad came through (1839), it cut off the original driveway that entered from Warm Springs Road to the northeast. The house was built in a low area so as to not be easily visible to Indians. This location was also at the head waters of Elk Branch. The windows on the eastern side of the house were situated for sunlight in the mornings. The original section has at least one window (facing north) that still contains the original frame and glass in the upper portion. Of the original 886 acres in the two land grants, only 10 belong to the current property. Between the railroad tracks and rapid industrial development, the quaint little piece of property is rapidly becoming sandwiched in between modern-day commercialism.

A Test Loaf is Removed...

...to be sure that the baking process is completed. Ina Pittman another dedicated volunteer moves the boule toward the table.



Ina Uses a Metal Stem Type Thermometer...

...seen imbedded in the loaf to make sure it's done.



Soup's On

Here we see Wayne Braunstein, a FOPB volunteer, removing two finished loaves from the oven. The oven can bake about 40 boule shaped breads at one time.



The Finished Loaves Await Packaging

The variety of breads is dependent on a number of factors including the type and proportions of flour used and rather exotic additions such as blue cheese and walnuts. We observed whole wheat, sourdough and raisin bread being prepared. Earlier some volunteers were treated to bits of chocolate in several loaves.



Surveying Their Handiwork

Jane and Kathryn (we suspect Emily was all tuckered out from supervising) check the loaves and select some to take home. The FOPB sells the bread for \$5 a loaf to use toward the property's restoration as well as ongoing archaeological work.

The bread here is in what is now the front room with the larger fireplace (not visible in this picture). Notice the blue chair rail that goes around each wall. It is also visible in the far room on the distant wall. The chair rail also has the same millwork as the door and window frames. This trim was both a luxury item and an art in the wilderness of those days.

Beaming with Pride



Nothing satisfies like a job well done and Kathryn and Jane and Emily have done yeoman's work today.

Notice the chair rail in the background and the wall surfaces that have survived 250 years. To the far right you can just begin to see the frame from the eastward facing window. The papers taped to the table list Peter Burr's property that was included in his will. (I have copies of that list for anyone who wants a copy.)

The Inside Story

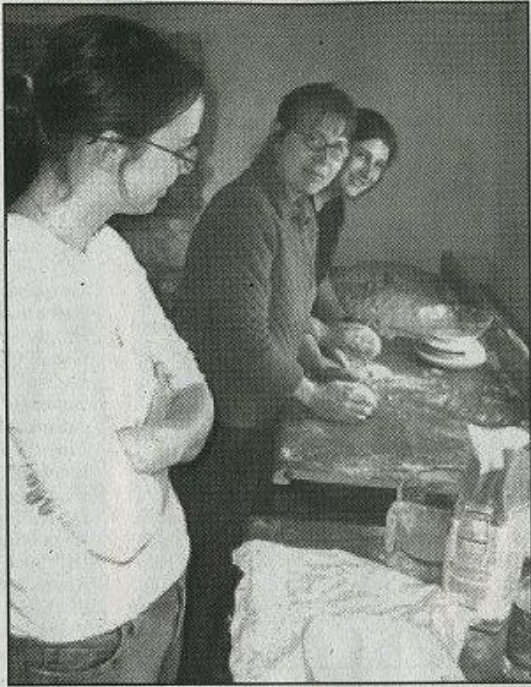


The combination of the brick oven, the ingredients, and the "hands on" preparation produces a thick-crustured chewy bread. Today, we call this "artisan bread," and it's very difficult to duplicate without baking it the way our ancestors did. And it has those bubbles that produce the "nooks and crannies" that we like in OUR bread.

Again notice the close up of the chair rail behind the bread boules.

Bill Theriault Spreads the News

SPiRiT OF JEFFERSON Farmer's ADVOCATE - Thursday, April 21, 2005



Students Emily Messenger, Jane Brenner, and Kathryn Berlin shape dough into boules during the bread baking class.



Volunteer Wayne Braunstein takes finished bread out of the colonial brick oven.

Volunteers Bake Bread to Make Dough

About a dozen students and volunteers gathered at Peter Burr Living History Farm last Friday and Saturday to learn how to make artisan bread and to help raise money to restore the historic house. The oven was fired for the first time this season at 7 a.m. on Friday morning and was operated round the clock until about 3 p.m. Saturday.

The first batch went into the wood-fired brick oven about 4 p.m. Friday and baked about 140 loaves.

Volunteers and students from Shepherd University's Museum Studies Class worked through Friday night into Saturday morning. They were relieved by other students, volunteers and participants in Jefferson County's Adult Education Program.

The session gave attendees the opportunity to experience the complete process of baking artisan bread and sample their creations. Bread baked included white, whole wheat, apple, raisin spice, and cherry chocolate.

Visitors arrived throughout Saturday to view the baking process and to buy bread. More than \$400 was raised from the day's effort.

The group plans to bake once a month throughout the summer and fall. The following bake days have been set: May 21, June 18, July 15, August 20, September 17, and October 15.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, call Bill Theriault at (301) 582-2846.

And Emily, Jane, Kathryn, Ina and Wayne become world famous on the World Wide Web.

<http://www.shannondaleclubalumni.org/burrrpages/breadbake4-2005/1.htm>

The brief slideshow is a pictorial account of the bread baking operation at Burr House. You are encouraged to read the more in-depth account linked above and, better yet, come out and volunteer to help Bill bake Bread!!!

The land is officially designated as a "wetlands" and is a setting for bird watching. The small "kitchen garden" and orchard on the other side of the house are planted with heirloom trees, herbs, and other plants that would have been grown during the time of Peter Burr and his family. These are also maintained by volunteers. A nature trail between the house and the nearby elementary school was once planted with indigenous trees and hopefully will be revived as negotiations with the county and commercial industry continue. Limited electricity and water are used in one of the new utility building that contains a modern kitchen, 2 bathrooms, and a wheelchair ramp.

The bread baking occurs for the purpose of generating funds for restoration of the house and property and education. Contributions are tax exempt for the house that is listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. Contributions can be made through the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission or through Reliving History, Inc. a West Virginia corporation with 501(c)(3) IRS tax exempt status.