

What is FLAX SCUTCHING?



Flax Scutching turns flax plants into linen cloth

Before clothing stores, textile mills, and Eli Whitney's cotton gin, there was linen. For thousands of years, people have been turning fibers of the flax plant into linen cloth. When Europeans settled the American frontier, flax was one of the first plants cultivated.

Flax scutching turns flax fibers into linen cloth. The Stahlstown Flax Scutching Festival demonstrates the process as it has been practiced for more than 250 years in the Ligonier Valley. Here are the basic steps:

Harvesting: Flax is pulled from the ground - not cut. (The roots contain some of the finest fibers.)

Retting: Harvested plants are spread thinly over a field to absorb dew, rain and the sun's heat, which rots the pith and loosens the fibers – a two to three week process known as “dew retting”.

Drying: Retted plants are placed atop a frame called a “kiln” over a low fire until they become, according to pioneer tradition, “as dry as tinder”.

Breaking: Dried plant stalks are pummeled by a “breaker” which has opposing wooden blades hinged at one end, to break the woody pith and loosen the fine fibers.

Scutching: The fibers are held against a vertical board, where they are scraped with a scutching paddle, causing the woody pith to fall away, leaving long, glossy fibers.

Heckling: Fibers are drawn through rows of iron spikes, working from coarser (larger, wider spaced) teeth into finer (smaller, closer) teeth, to remove remaining pulp along with the shorter, coarser strands of fiber.

Spinning: The fine fiber is spun into linen thread, which is wound onto a bobbin.

Weaving: Finally, the bobbin is placed in a shuttle, which is threaded back and forth through a linen loom to make cloth.



a two day celebration of early-Americana

Saturday & Sunday
SEPTEMBER 18-19, 2021

Monticue Grove in Stahlstown, PA

www.flaxscutching.org | Find us on Facebook



P.O. Box 77, Stahlstown, PA 15687

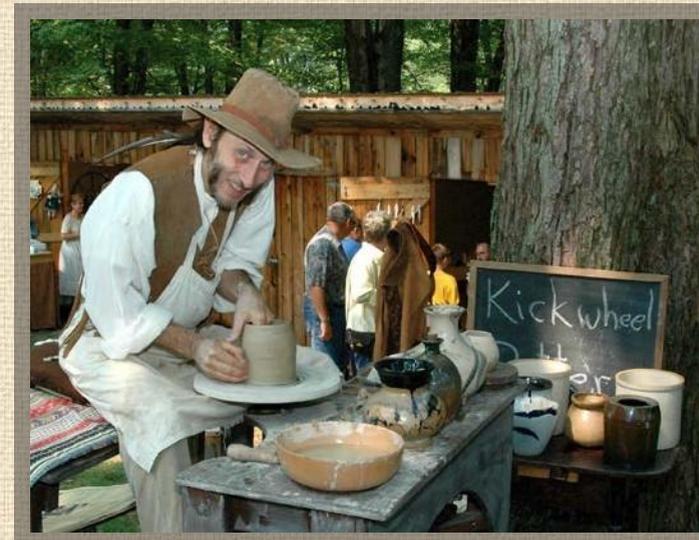
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Oldest Flax Scutching Festival in the Western Hemisphere

This is the oldest active festival of its type in the Western Hemisphere. The centennial anniversary was celebrated in 2007.

Dating to the first settlers back in the 1770s, flax has been raised and scutched in the Ligonier Valley. Traditionally, farming families would gather after the harvest to share the labor-intensive chore of turning flax fibers into linen. Their gatherings quickly became social events with shared food and folk music.

In 1907, local Justice of the Peace, Elmer N. Miller, conceived an annual reunion to celebrate the valley's history of homey pleasures. A mock "Indian Raid" commemorated several actual raids that occurred here in the 1770s and '80s. Homemade foods, traditional music, displays of antiques and demonstrations of folk arts offered tastes of the past. And the event was centered around flax scutching to preserve this disappearing folk craft.

Today the festival continues to reflect all of these rich traditions:

- Drawing upon more than 250 years of oral tradition, Ligonier Valley residents still demonstrate how flax plants were turned into linen cloth. The National Park Service and other historical groups have come here to observe this vital pioneer craft.
- Other folk crafts and vintage farming equipment are displayed.
- Living history experience.
- The mock Indian Raid remains a festival feature.
- Traditional foods provide delicious tastes of the past.



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 Monticue Grove in Stahlstown, PA
Stahlstown is located on PA Route 711

Admission: \$5.00 per person
 12 and under free

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
www.flaxscutching.org
 Find us on Facebook
 Email: flaxscutching@gmail.com
 724-593-2119

Great Family Entertainment!

Homespun FUN!

- Learn how linen was made
- Enjoy live country, bluegrass and gospel music
- Children's area – young and old, for the kid in each of us
- Eat buckwheat cakes and sausage
- See the Indian Raid – a festival tradition
- Marvel at the antique farm machinery
- Sample homemade soups and fresh-pressed apple cider
- Observe demonstrations of blacksmithy, pottery-throwing, and flax demonstrations
- Outdoor worship Sunday morning
- Stop at the kitchen for sandwiches, sides and plate lunches
- Wander in the Flax Scutching Historical area
- Experience various re-enactors/encampments