

Mark L. Loudon, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. Pp. ix-473. Hardcover, \$59.95 USD.

Even though *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*, by Mark L. Loudon, traces the development of an American language, Canadian speakers of Mennonite Low German and Hütterisch, as well as those interested in German and linguistics, will learn much in this comprehensive, informative, and engaging book. Despite not being taught in schools, often not written down, or having any official governmental status, and not enjoying much recognition from outsiders, this book explores the successful maintenance of a language over generations. Although it would seem that all odds are against this language, it continues to be spoken both in North and South America. Readers of all backgrounds will quickly find themselves deeply absorbed in this history of a language and its speakers.

Pennsylvania Dutch is an enlightening, educational and enjoyable read, mostly due to the skill of the author. Loudon is a world-renowned expert on Germanic languages, especially Pennsylvania Dutch. He is a professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, known for his holistic research on Germanic languages, including sociolinguistic, historical, grammatical and phonetic points of inquiry. It is this comprehensive approach to the history of a language that makes his most recent book so valuable.

Pennsylvania Dutch is for many a confusing and perhaps misleading term. Loudon devotes the first chapter, "What is Pennsylvania Dutch?" to defining the term and identifying the characteristics of the language. Pennsylvania Dutch, also known as Pennsylvania German, is a language "descended from varieties of speech brought to eighteenth-century Pennsylvania by immigrants who spoke forms of German and not Dutch (Netherlandic)" (2). Thus, Pennsylvania Dutch has its origins in German, but developed

its own characteristics and vocabulary once in North America. Loudon offers ample source documents in this chapter that underscore that the language is related to German, borrows vocabulary from English, but that structurally, lexically, and sociolinguistically, it is a language in its own right.

Chapters two through five look at the history of the German settlements and impact of these settlements on the development of Pennsylvania Dutch in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first German settlers in the Pennsylvania area were ethnic Swiss Mennonites and Palatine Mennonites, and Palatine Germans, and included both sectarians (Mennonites and Amish) and nonsectarians (Lutherans and members of German Reformed churches) (65). By the 1780s the Pennsylvania Dutch language existed. This section ends with a study of Pennsylvania Dutch in print. When Pennsylvania Dutch appeared in the local German-language newspapers or periodicals, it was often in humorous articles that made light of the mostly rural Pennsylvania Dutch speakers, in contrast to their more sophisticated urban counterparts. However, as Loudon points out, that Pennsylvania Dutch speakers learned to appreciate this distinction, “is crucial to understanding how the language has endured right up to the present day” (118). It was exactly the separation from mainstream society that defined the Pennsylvania Dutch speakers and allowed them to maintain their language against the odds.

By the early nineteenth century, most speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch “enjoyed a level of material comfort that allowed them to feel good about who they were, culturally and linguistically, as a people distinct from both Yankees and Germans” (177). They were able to read and communicate in English or German, but were also able to publish and read periodicals in Pennsylvania Dutch. In fact, the second half of the nineteenth century saw an increase in the number and type of publications in Pennsylvania Dutch, and it was also a time in which especially nonsectarian speakers of the language began to show more pride in their identity, including in their language. This era also saw an increase in language clubs and publications devoted to maintaining Pennsylvania Dutch. On the other hand, sectarian speakers of the language, including Amish and Mennonite communities, required no similar efforts to maintain their language and culture, due to their isolated lifestyle and the integration of language with religious values.

Chapters six and seven explore the role of Pennsylvania Dutch among the Amish and Mennonites. Loudon establishes that early on, the sectarian and nonsectarian speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch

lived in relative proximity to one another and so the language that each group spoke was similar to that of the other, and that even today, they can understand one another. Louden further examines the reasons that Pennsylvania Dutch has been maintained among sectarian populations. He points especially to the dynamic nature of the language as spoken by Amish and Mennonite populations, which is allowed to grow and change with influence from English as necessary. Louden also brings into the discussion the similar linguistic experiences of Old Colony Mennonites in Canada and South America – speakers of *Plautdietsch*, German and English – as well as the Hutterites, who speak Hütterisch, German and English. Among these groups, “maintenance of a dual-variety Germanic mother tongue is a salient marker of a social-spiritual identity distinct from that of their Canadian and US neighbors” (367). Thus, their story is not so different from that of speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch.

Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language is filled with illustrations, poems, clippings from periodicals and newspapers, songs and other linguistic artifacts carefully chosen by Louden to support his thorough descriptions of Pennsylvania Dutch from several perspectives: linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and historical. It is accompanied by an extensive website (padutch.net) with even more print and audio examples to satisfy the curiosity of all readers wanting to gain an in-depth knowledge of the intriguing and enduring Pennsylvania Dutch language.

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