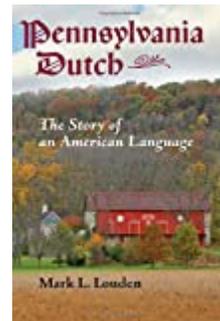




Mark L. Loudon. *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 504 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4214-1828-5.



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In many ways, the continued existence and growth of Pennsylvania Dutch as a first language (L1) among sectarian speakers is nothing short of remarkable. In spite of constant external pressure from mainstream English-speaking society, Pennsylvania Dutch remains the primary language of the home for Old Order Amish and conservative Mennonite congregations throughout North America. In his book, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*, Mark Loudon, one of the world's foremost experts on the language, literature, and culture of Pennsylvania Dutch, provides an historical overview of the birth and development of this language up to the present day. Loudon leads his readership on a detailed journey through the history of this language, its speakers, and their relevance beyond southeastern Pennsylvania.

The introductory chapter tackles the difficult question of defining what Pennsylvania Dutch is and is not. Loudon puts forward the case for calling this language Pennsylvania Dutch rather than Pennsylvania German, even though the latter is more common in academic circles (among linguists in particular). Loudon's motivation for using Pennsylvania Dutch is primarily due to the fact that this term more aptly captures the distinct identity of the initial generation of speakers who settled in the

countryside of southwestern Pennsylvania and invoked the classically American notion of liberty to justify their right to maintain a language with roots extending into the colonial period that had become uniquely their own (p. 9). Loudon also addresses the thorny issue of whether Pennsylvania Dutch should be classified as a dialect or a language. He ultimately opts for calling Pennsylvania Dutch a language based primarily on the sociolinguistic distinctiveness of those who have continued to speak and then pass the language down to their progeny. These individuals enjoy a special connection with the unique Pennsylvania Dutch culture that was, and still is, separate from other diasporic German-speaking communities. In the remainder of chapter 1, Loudon provides a condensed overview of the grammatical properties of Pennsylvania Dutch, highlighting its strong German roots. Loudon goes on the offensive to demonstrate that English influence on the language (aside from vocabulary, especially nouns) has been relatively limited in scope over the course of three centuries. What is more, Loudon dispels the myth of purported connections between "Dutchified" or "Ferdoodled English" (i.e., incompletely acquired or "broken" English) as an accurate depiction of Pennsylvania German grammar, going so far as to cast doubt that such examples were ever produced by native speakers of

the language.

The remaining chapters in the book (chapters 2-6) move largely in chronological order, with chapter 2 focusing on immigration and the early history of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Loudon makes the important distinction between German-speakers who predominantly settled in the Philadelphia area (*Deitschlenner*, or German-speaking people) and the Pennsylvania Dutch who settled in the hinterlands of southeastern Pennsylvania, whose speech was considered to be "bastard gibberish" by outsiders more familiar with contemporary literary German. Around the turn of the nineteenth century Pennsylvania German appeared for the first time in print, often cast in a pejorative light as the speech of the un(der)educated. The common theme of confronting myths about the development of Pennsylvania Dutch and the stereotypes placed upon its speakers takes center stage in this chapter. Chapter 3 documents the continued development of Pennsylvania Dutch between 1800 and 1860, a time in which the sociolinguistic conditions for the speakers of this language (e.g., farmers, craftsmen, and laborers) was relatively stable. Loudon also introduces the linguistic construct of Pennsylvania High German, which starting in the nineteenth century became the prescriptive norm for those few—typically pastors and journalists—who were involved in occupations that required reading and writing. Towards the end of this time period, a literary presence in Pennsylvania Dutch began to emerge, with more frequent publications in the language appearing in periodicals such as *Der Bauern Freund* (The farmers' friend). Those who retained their Dutch heritage (and language), who "kept 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" (p. 177). The bloom of Pennsylvania Dutch literature in the second half of the nineteenth century is treated in chapter 4.

Chapters 5 and 6 address the language and culture of nonsectarian and sectarian Pennsylvania Dutch-speakers respectively in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Loudon again provides evidence to counter inaccurate and hostile stereotypes of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Although the language itself has become moribund among nonsectarians, the study of this language and its impressive culture has become commonplace in the academy, and Loudon points out that public gatherings such as the Kutztown Festival and institutions such as the Grundsow Lodges legitimize and promote the study and appreciation of this unique culture and its contributions to regional and national identity.[1] The book

ends on an upbeat note in chapter 6, where Loudon introduces the language and culture of sectarian speakers of Pennsylvania German (i.e., Old Order Amish and Conservative Mennonite Orders), whose population nearly doubles with every generation and who continue to pass along Pennsylvania Dutch to coming generations. Toward the end of this chapter, Loudon makes allusions to the ever-expanding geographic distribution of Old Order Pennsylvania German-speaking communities, which although mutually intelligible, present unique and important opportunities to study the emerging diversity in varieties of Pennsylvania Dutch.[2]

A common motif throughout this book is Loudon's mission to set the record straight with respect to erroneous representations and caricatures of Pennsylvania Dutch speech and culture throughout the centuries. This observation certainly should not be taken as a criticism of this book, which in all respects is a piece of solid scholarship, but Loudon's preoccupation does shape the narrative of the book as a whole, and the reader is left with a somewhat romantized view of Pennsylvania Dutch and its speakers. Yet the substantial contribution of the book is more striking. Loudon should be especially praised for drawing upon some impressive sources (e.g., newspaper articles and advertisements, letters, diaries, literary works) that are largely unknown and inaccessible to the general public. The interspersing of this material throughout the book helps bring to life a history that would otherwise have been a bit dry in spots.

Portraying the history of Pennsylvania Dutch accurately is a daunting task, requiring the inclusion of materials from often tangentially related academic disciplines. Loudon successfully weaves a complex tapestry that provides an exhaustive historical account of this language and its speakers and is easily accessible to multiple audiences. Upon finishing this work the scholar is left curious as to what the future holds for Pennsylvania Dutch and its legacy. Although it may not have been Loudon's primary intention, his book serves as an invitation for further explorations, leaving the impression that important research is yet to be conducted. That is a great achievement for a seminal work, as surely *Pennsylvania Dutch* can be judged.

Notes

[1]. William W. Donner, *Serious Nonsense: Groundhog Lodges, Versammlinge, and Pennsylvania German Heritage* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016).

[2]. Steven H. Keiser, *Pennsylvania German in the American Midwest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

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