

***The Parker Sisters
A Border Kidnapping***

by Lucy Maddox

Temple University Press,
256 pp., cloth \$28.50

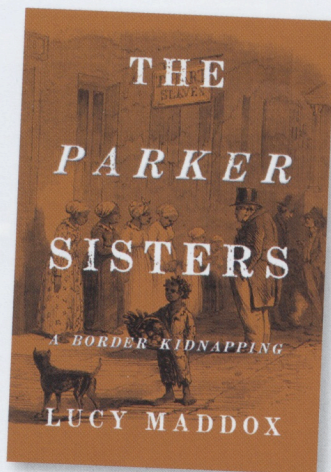
Reviewed by
Christopher Densmore

The border where Chester County, Pennsylvania, adjoined Cecil County, Maryland, was contested territory in the conflict between “free” and “slave” states in the decades before the

Civil War. Lucy Maddox provides a thoroughly researched account of one notable incident in this history, the abduction of the sisters Elizabeth and Rachel Parker from Nottingham Township, Chester County, by Elkton, Maryland, slave catcher Thomas McCreary in two separate incidents in December 1851. The liberation of the sisters through the efforts of their Chester County neighbors, with the assistance of Thomas Corkran and others, many of them Quakers, at Baltimore, took more than a year.

Maddox observes that the nature of the events and the language used to describe them was markedly different on the two sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. On the Maryland side, McCreary was viewed as having legitimately recovered fugitive slaves. On the Pennsylvania side, he was regarded as a kidnapper who should have been tried for his crimes. Maddox places the incident within the context of both the sectional conflict, particularly with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, and the experiences of the Parker family over several generations. The level of animosity is graphically demonstrated in the death of Elizabeth Parker’s employer, Joseph Miller, who was found hanging near the railroad line running north from Baltimore after a failed attempt by Miller and others to secure the release of Elizabeth. Maryland authorities ruled Miller’s death a suicide, while in Pennsylvania it was considered a murder, perhaps in retaliation for the death of Maryland slave owner Edward Gorsuch during the Christiana Resistance earlier in 1851.

The author is sensitive to the nuances of race relations and antislavery sentiment in the North. She demonstrates that although many of those involved from Chester County were committed to retrieving the Parker sisters from enslavement, expending both time and money to do so, they also distanced themselves from the label “abolitionists.” In all, the book is a masterful recreation of events, based on extensive use of primary sources. The kidnapping of the Parker sisters is a story worthy of this effort. Another recent work, *Stealing Freedom along the Mason-Dixon Line: Thomas McCreary, the Notorious Slave Catcher from Maryland* by Milt Diggins (Maryland Historical Society), is equally as well researched and presented, covering much of the same territory, although Diggins focuses on McCreary rather than the Parker sisters. Both authors provide insight into the considerable sectional strife over slavery. Their ability to see the conflict through the perspectives of slave catchers, victims and rescuers alike is a model for research.



***Pennsylvania Dutch
The Story of an American Language***

by Mark L. Loudon

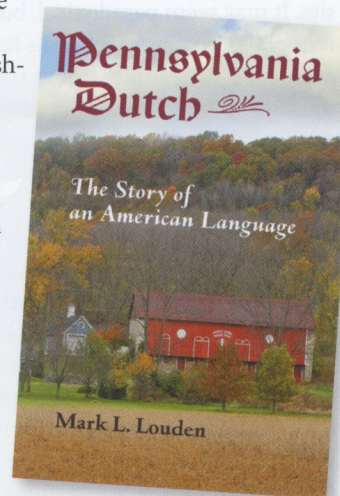
Johns Hopkins University Press, 504 pp., cloth \$59.95

Reviewed by Patrick Donmoyer

The controversy over the origins, identity and persistence of one of America’s most misunderstood minority languages has been positively settled by Loudon’s unparalleled presentation of Pennsylvania Dutch, for which even the proper name has been the subject of disagreement for generations. With a balanced and thorough approach, as well as a copious use of primary sources, Loudon clarifies the sociolinguistic and cultural climate that produced this unique language in early Pennsylvania and traces its growth through four centuries of development and change.

This work boldly asserts the accuracy of the hotly debated term “Pennsylvania Dutch,” as opposed to “Pennsylvania German,” and closely examines the basis for its linguistic status as a language rather than merely a dialect. Drawing upon a broad spectrum of sources, both literary and oral, popular and folk, sacred and secular, this “story of an American language” leaves no doubt that Pennsylvania Dutch is not a “pitifully broken mish-mash of English and German,” as some have erroneously proclaimed over the centuries. It is instead a language that has maintained a high level of original integrity from its Palatine source and has been enhanced, rather than diluted, by its history of unavoidable contact with English. Loudon gently dispels many myths promoted by the tourist industry pertaining to the language’s confusion with the Dutchified English accent and the use of nonsensical idioms invented to sell tourist novelties.

Although there are abundant literary passages in Pennsylvania Dutch, in each case such texts are accompanied by full translations and thus pose no obstacle to the readability and quality of the text for those unfamiliar with the language. Interestingly enough, although the subject may be near and dear to Pennsylvanians, Loudon challenges readers to see a larger American context that exceeds the geographical and cultural boundaries of the half-dozen counties in Pennsylvania where the language developed and extends to the heart of the continent where the largest concentration of native speakers are located in the Midwestern sectarian communities of the Old Order Amish, optimistically confirming, despite a decline among nonsectarian speakers, the potential for a dynamic and healthy future for the Pennsylvania Dutch language. While maintaining a highly academic orientation, Loudon captures the spirit of the folk-cultural narrative and remains engaging, accessible and entertaining to a wide range of audiences.



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