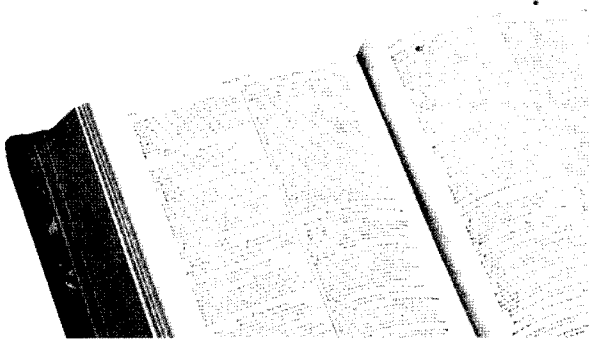


The Library



Pennsylvania Dutch

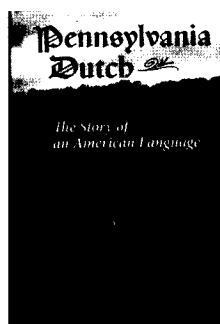
The Story of an American Language

Mark L. Loudon

6 x 9, 475 Pages, Hardcover

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016

List Price: \$59.95



This is a truly unusual book. It is an authoritative book on a poorly-understood and often maligned language – Pennsylvania Dutch. Further, it is written by an “outsider”, a non-native PA Dutch speaker that has mastered the language, to the point of fluency in its regional/cultural variations.

The author does a very interesting analysis of the early (pre-1800) formative years of PA Dutch by the Mennonite-Amish and Lutheran-Reformed “founder population”. The overwhelming majority of Pennsylvania German speakers were “non-sectarian” Lutheran and Reformed immigrants. The “sectarian” groups consisted of the following – in order of decreasing numbers: Mennonites, Moravians, Amish, Dunkers, Schwenkfelders and Waldensians. The counties most heavily populated by PA Dutch speakers were (by today’s boundaries) Berks, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, and York.

A conversation I had with an English-speaking friend over 30 years ago portrays a common misconception about the PA Dutch language. Dan did not actually speak any German, but gleaned a little knowledge of the language while briefly deployed in Germany with the US Army. Based on this “expertise” he pronounced the PA Dutch language to have been “bastardized” by English “loan-words”. Loudon argues that PA Dutch is a legitimate language in its own right.

Author Profile

I met Mark Loudon back in about 1985 as we were browsing in a bookstore (where else?) by the name of The Blue Fox, in Ithaca, New York. Mark was a young student of Germanic Linguistics at Cornell University in Ithaca, and asked if we were from Penn Yan. Mark stated that he wanted

to meet Amish or Mennonites. This started a long association and friendship with Mark. He spent much time in our home and local community, attending church services and even teaching the young folks’ “singing school”. He also attended Amish church services in other states and communities, in the process becoming thoroughly proficient in the PA Dutch language, including all its regional variations.

In 1986 Mark was invited to my brother’s wedding. Mark was decked out in his “Mennonite garb”, complete with hat and all. It was humorous to see people shake his hand and inquire, “and who would you be?” “Mark Loudon”, was the reply. “Mark...?” Pause... “Louden”, Mark repeated. “Louden...?” they echoed, with puzzled expressions. Everyone knew there couldn’t be a Mennonite by the name of Loudon. This was quite humorous indeed.

Mark acquired his PhD at Cornell, received a job offer from the University of Texas, and subsequently moved to Texas. Mark is currently Professor in the Department of German at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and lives in Sun Prairie, WI.

The book has many word comparisons with High German and other dialects, definitions of the PA Dutch language, and detailed explanations of history, grammar, syntax, etc. On the down side is the rather high price tag, which is more typical of academic books. On the plus side, this work was done by what might arguably be considered the premier Pennsylvania Dutch language scholar – Mark Loudon.

Reviewed by Ivan Martin, Penn Yan, NY

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