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Pennsylvania Dutch Day invites attendees to learn about traditional American language

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Members of the American Translators Association's German Language Division attend a workshop in Karlsruhe, Germany. The organization will host their first Pennsylvania Dutch Day event in Lancaster city later this month.

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Welcome back! Thank you, for being a subscriber and supporting local journalism.

The Amish population in North America nearly doubles every 20 years, according to a 2023 study by Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. This suggests the number of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers is rising at a similar rate, said Mark Loudon, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

To become a part of this growing group and learn some Pennsylvania Dutch yourself, a great place to start is Pennsylvania Dutch Day, an educational event planned for July 19 in Southern Market at 100 S. Queen St. in Lancaster city. In addition to sharing information about and the history of the language, organizers hope to raise awareness about the need for Pennsylvania Dutch interpreters.

This event will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m, featuring a keynote address, educational presentations and a panel discussion. It is organized by the American Translators Association's German Language Division in collaboration with the Delaware Valley Translators Association.

Pennsylvania Dutch Day will be held in The Willow, Southern Market's first-floor meeting space. Tickets cost \$100 for German Language Division and Delaware Valley Translators Association members, and \$140 for non-members. Registration closes July 14.

READ: [Late 'Bard of Brickerville' posted daily poems for a decade; his work may now become a book](#)

En Brief an der Parre vun der Jakobus Herch am stehnige Himmel.

Lieber Parre!—Ich muß emol en Brief schreibe, daß
ihr seht, wie's in unsere Gemee grad nau mit dem Bezahle
steht un was ihr zu exspekte hätt, wann's noch en Weil so
fort geht. Awer erst muß ich bitte, daß ihr mei Deutsch ex-
tuhst, for mei Hochdeutsch saund en Bissel pennsylvanisch.
Awer was macht sell Alles, wann just die Mehning gut is
un es kummt vum Herz; un sell kann ich euch inschure, daß
ich's gut mit euch mehn un daß mei Herz so denkt, wie ich
schreib.

This is an example of printed Pennsylvania Dutch from the 19th century. In English, the title reads: "A letter to the pastor of St. James Church at Stony Mountain".

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A need for interpreters

Pennsylvania Dutch is a language that evolved from the German dialects spoken by German-speaking immigrants in Pennsylvania during the 18th century. Today, it is spoken primarily by Amish and Mennonite communities as their first language, and it is only used in North America.

Event organizer Karen Leube said the American Translators Association's German Language Division wanted to raise awareness about opportunities to learn Pennsylvania Dutch and shed light on the difficulties that Pennsylvania Dutch speakers and their interpreters face.

"I think that we, as an association, realized we need to be the guardians of language," Leube said. "We, as an association, are also trying very hard to stick up for the rights of people whose native language is not English."

Specifically, native Pennsylvania Dutch speakers may need help with translation services in the judicial system, hospital and other areas.

"Even if they know English from their schooling, it's really helpful to have an interpreter who speaks one's language from home for things that are as intimate as a court case or hospitalization," Leube said.



Karen Leube is the event organizer for Pennsylvania Dutch Day, and she also serves as the administrator for the American Translators Association's German Language Division.

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The event will host a panel discussion with local Pennsylvania Dutch interpreters about why their work is necessary and the path to becoming one. They will also discuss the gaps in translation service in Pennsylvania.

Leube listed the many requirements a Pennsylvania Dutch interpreter must fulfill, including speaking both English and Pennsylvania Dutch proficiently, understanding the culture of Amish and Mennonite communities and gaining their trust. She said these demands can pose a challenge for training more interpreters.

"We've never done anything like this before," said Leube, who said she's curious to see if they can hold similar events in the future. "I felt this is something that people would really benefit from learning more about."

Mark Loudon, keynote speaker



1 of 2



Mark Loudon, a professor of German linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, will be the keynote speaker at Pennsylvania Dutch Day.

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What to expect

The event will kick off with a keynote address by Loudon, the professor from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Loudon said he picked up Pennsylvania Dutch after he became a member of the Mennonite Church about 40 years ago.

He also published a book in 2016 titled "Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language", detailing the language's history. In his keynote address, he said he will discuss this history, clarify misunderstandings about Pennsylvania Dutch and share who speaks it and how it is used today.



"I hope that people come away with a greater appreciation for the rich legacy of Pennsylvania Dutch as a distinct language," Louden said. "It's a language that is as old as the United States."

Other highlights of the event include a presentation about Pennsylvania Dutch's cultural context, given by professor Steve M. Nolt from Elizabethtown College, and two units of Pennsylvania Dutch language lessons.

Eve Bodeux, a certified French to English translator who is learning Pennsylvania Dutch, will travel from Colorado to attend the event. She said she became interested in learning Pennsylvania Dutch because it is a part of her family's background.

Her paternal grandparents spoke the language, and her ancestor John Michael Lindenmuth was an original settler from Germany.

"I'm super excited to go to Lancaster for this special event," said Bodeux, who has been taking online classes in Pennsylvania Dutch through the Berks History Center, one of the sponsors for this event.

"It'd be interesting to hear a more academic explanation of some of the development of this language, and one that I'm connected to," Bodeux said.

If You Go

What: American Translators Association's German Language Division presents Pennsylvania Dutch Day.

When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m, Saturday, July 19.

Where: Southern Market, 100 S. Queen St., Lancaster.

Cost: \$100 for GLD and DVTA members, and \$140 for non-members.

More info: lanc.news/padutchday25.

