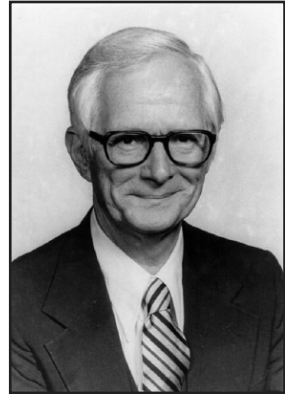


Don Yoder (1921-2015): In Memoriam

Shortly before his 94th birthday, our beloved colleague and “dean” of Pennsylvania German folklife, Don Yoder, died on August 11, 2015, in Devon, Pennsylvania. He was devoted to the history and culture of Pennsylvania, especially the folkways of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Don was Professor Emeritus of Folklife Studies, Religious Studies, and American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where he taught for forty years (1956-96) and directed some 60 doctoral dissertations.



Don was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on August 27, 1921, to Jacob H. and Ora M. Yoder. He earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of Chicago in 1947. After teaching at Union Theological Seminary and Muhlenberg College, Don taught at Franklin & Marshall College for several years before joining the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in 1956.

In 1949, Don co-founded the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center at Franklin & Marshall College with Alfred L. Shoemaker and J. William Frey, which later became the Pennsylvania Folklife Society. In the same year, they initiated the journal *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*—later renamed *Pennsylvania Folklife*—for which Don served as either co-editor or editor for some three decades. The three Franklin & Marshall colleagues also established the Kutztown Folk Festival in 1950, the first ethnic festival of its kind. The festival was designed to be an educational experience for visitors consisting of demonstrations, seminars, performances and presentations.

After his arrival at the University of Pennsylvania, he was instrumental in establishing the first folklife studies program in the United States. Don

is, indeed, the father of the notion of “folklife” as a field for scholarly study. He defined it in his 1974 essay published in *Pennsylvania Folklife*: “The term ‘folklife’ . . . means the total range of traditional culture as researchable in the regional or ethnic contexts.” with a particular emphasis on the activities of daily life. This distinctive approach differed from folklore, which focused research on the collection of verbal cultural material. This folklife methodology embraced all aspects of life and greatly expanded the scope of folk cultural study and preservation. By broadening his scholarly interests in folksongs and spirituals beyond expressive culture to encompass the entire way of life of a particular group, Don researched and published on material culture, foodways, magical practices, and calendar customs and much more.

Don was an early member of the Society for German-American Studies and served from 1984 until 1996 on the Editorial Board of the *Yearbook of German-American Studies*. His insightful as well as helpful critiques of essays made a significant contribution to the quality of our publication and the scholarship of our authors. At our 12th Symposium at Millersville University of Pennsylvania in 1988, Don gave the keynote address entitled “The ‘Dutchman’ and ‘Deitschlenner’: The New World Confronts the Old.” This author vividly recalls the impact that Don’s clear and concise analysis had for our understanding of that issue. The editors were very pleased to publish Don’s keynote address in the *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 23 (1988): 1-17. The Society also honored Don for his many contributions to German-American Studies with its Outstanding Achievement Award, presented during that 1988 Symposium held in Millersville, Pennsylvania. At the Symposium in Millersville, Don was also generous enough to give this author a personal guided tour of the periodicals and archives in the Shadak-Fackenthal Library at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster treating the culture and history of the Pennsylvania Germans—just the two of us. His enthusiasm and joy as a scholar of Pennsylvania folkways on that evening was infectious. That he would take the time for this tour on the busy evening prior to his keynote address amazed me. But that simple gesture of Don’s remains a testament in my mind to his never-ending devotion to the joy of scholarly inquiry.

William D. Keel
Editor