

*William W. Donner*

## **The First College Course in Pennsylvania German**

Earl Haag has devoted much time and energy to teaching and developing teaching materials for the Pennsylvania German language. In this essay, I want to pay tribute to Earl's work by describing what must have been the earliest example of teaching Pennsylvania German.

In 1876, twenty-three students from Keystone State Normal School (now Kutztown University) took an examination in Pennsylvania German. Their answers, written in long hand, can be found in a musty old copybook in the archives at Rohrbach Library at Kutztown University. This copybook must surely be the earliest example of Pennsylvania German being taught as a subject in a college and probably in any school at any level.<sup>1</sup>

The copybook included the answers of the twenty-three students to the same five statements. Each student wrote each statement (presumably dictated to them), first in Pennsylvania German and then translated each statement into English. The spellings in Pennsylvania German are similar, but Pennsylvania German never had a standardized orthography and different students used slightly different spellings; sometimes the same student spelled the same Pennsylvania German term in two different ways in the same answer. The English translations are also very similar, usually direct translations from the Pennsylvania German into English that seem a bit awkward. Some students did not finish all five statements. Each student wrote their name at the beginning of the exercise and also at the end. After the name at the end was a statement about the time taken to complete the examination, usually forty to forty-five minutes. The first four statements are proverbs. The fifth refers to the then State Superintendent of Public Instruction, James Pyle Wickersham and his relationship with Pennsylvania Germans.

*'N blindi sow find aw ölsämol 'n achël.*

A blind hog also finds an acorn, sometimes.

Styghene State Normal School,  
1 Tuckersboro, Pa.

Examination in Translation.

By J. M. Schlicher.

A Hindi son find an animal in  
achel.

A Hindi pig sometimes also finds an  
acorn.

Hier nit-hare wil mus fele.

Whosoever does not hear must hear.

I mad us pife us d' hantel us hant,  
sub, me, bi, bit de bil sum deat.

The girls who whistle and howl that  
crow, one shall in time time  
round their throat.

I hunt nit of de grass an smelt  
hunt in the in hawo frage.  
I does not depend on the pige, or else  
a cow could catch a rabbit

Di School Superintendent is Kickerham,  
It means him School Superintendent  
is Kickerham. He is in very advanced  
more. He is in English over de  
Dijpke gleiche in d.

The School Superintendent Kickerham  
The name of the State Superintendent is  
Kickerham. He is very diligent man  
He is an English man but though all  
the Germans like him.

J. M. Schlicher

Time 40 Minutes.

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*Wär nēt harā, will mus felā.*

Who desires not to hear, must suffer.

*D'mad wo peifā un d'hinkel wo kraā*

*Sōl m'r bei zeit do hēls rum draā.*

The girls that whistle and the chickens that crow,  
should, in time, have their throats turned around (twisted).

*'S kumt nēt uf de gras au, sunsht kēnt 'n ku 'n haws fōngā.*

It does not depend on size, or else a cow could catch a rabbit.

*D'r Shool Soopërintëndēnder Wickërschām.*

*D'r nawmā fūm Shdad Soopërintëndēnder is Wickërschām.*

*Ar is 'n örg shmārdēr mōn.*

*Ar is 'n Englishër, öwār de Deitschā gleichā.*

The School Superintendent Wickersham.

The name of the state superintendent is Wickersham.

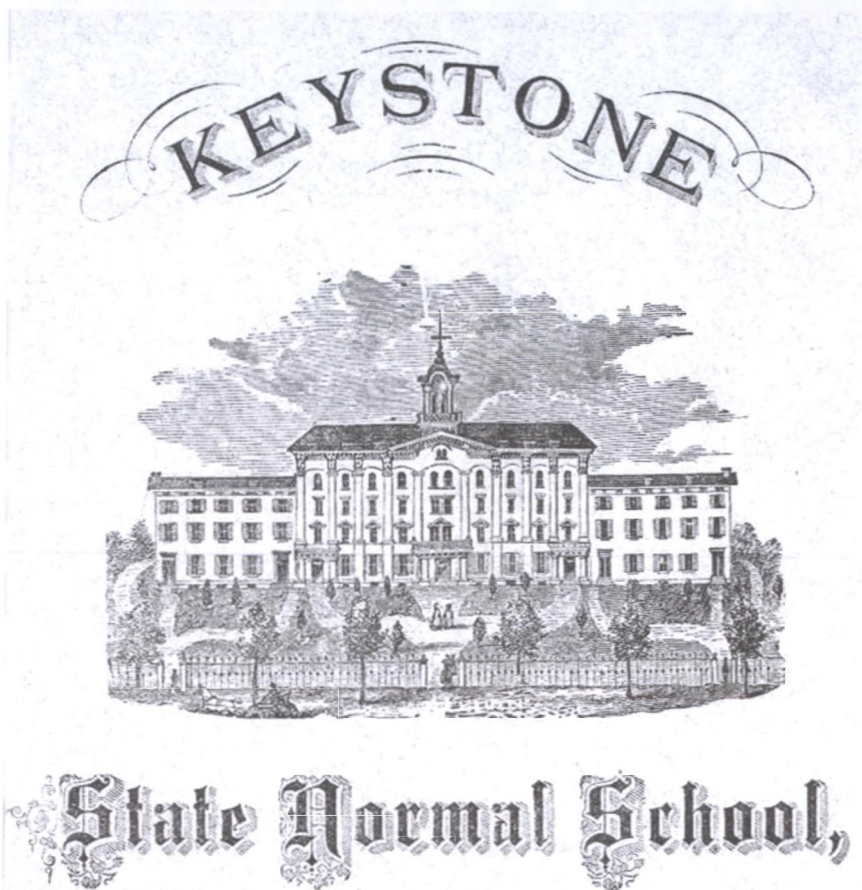
He is a very smart man.

He is English, but the Germans like him.

Keystone was established as a state normal school in 1866. Pennsylvania had established a common school law in 1834 and the state recognized the need to find qualified teachers for these common schools. Keystone was recognized by state officials as the school that most clearly represented the interests and addressed the problems of the state's Pennsylvania German population. The first principal of Keystone was John Ermentrout, who was also the superintendent of Berks County schools. Ermentrout was an early advocate of bilingual education for Pennsylvania Germans.<sup>2</sup> He believed that Pennsylvania German students should be taught by teachers who were sensitive to their background and knowledge of the Pennsylvania German language. The early catalogues of Keystone included a section outlining the importance of learning the German language. The catalogues from this time period stated:

Especial attention will be bestowed on the study of the German language. It is hardly possible to overrate the importance of knowledge of the German to the student who expects to teach in any county in Pennsylvania in which this noble language is spoken; for it is now an admitted fact that in order to instruct successfully, in the English, children whose mother tongue is German, the teacher ought to be master of both. Moreover, to the man of business such knowledge is beyond the price, while to the scholar it reveals treasures of science and literature of which he should not willingly be ignorant. To students shall be afforded every opportunity to acquire not only a theoretic, but also practical knowledge of it.<sup>3</sup>

In 1872, Keystone's Board of Trustees hired Abraham Reeser Horne to be principal. He is almost certainly the teacher who administered the exams



Nineteenth-century view of Keystone State Normal School.

in the copybook. Like Ermentrout, Horne was a Pennsylvania German who advocated bilingual instruction and strongly supported the interests and heritage of the Pennsylvania Germans. Horne was born in 1834 in Bucks County. He graduated from Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College), opened his own school in 1858 and became an ordained Lutheran pastor in 1860. From 1868–72 he was superintendent of public schools in Williamsport. In 1872 he was hired to teach at Keystone State Normal School. By this time he was one of the leading educators of Pennsylvania Germans. Horne was also the editor of an educational journal, the *National Educator*, that he published monthly and sometimes more frequently from 1860 until his death in 1902.<sup>4</sup>

Horne had some surprisingly liberal views of education. He was influenced by Johann Pestalozzi, a nineteenth-century Swiss educator who was inspired by the writings of Rousseau. Horne advocated a child-centered



Abraham Reeser Horne, from the *Pennsylvania German Manual* (1875).

approach to education that built upon the child's natural curiosity. Physical punishment should be minimal; instruction should try to direct the child's natural curiosity to constructive learning. Lessons should be based upon practical and ordinary tasks: botany and astronomy taught through field trips; arithmetic by measuring areas around the school; geography by making maps of the schoolyard. He opposed the common practice of recitation, which he disparagingly referred to by using the Pennsylvania German term, "*ufswaga*." He also was surprisingly liberal in his approach to school government and discipline, describing his management style as derived from Thomas Jefferson's maxim, "That is best governed which is least governed."<sup>5</sup>

A problem that confronted Pennsylvania German students, including those at Keystone who were training to become teachers, was that they often

had trouble speaking English; after all Pennsylvania German was their first language. Horne's first language was not English and he was especially sensitive to this issue. Horne thought that Pennsylvania Germans should learn English and insisted that they speak English without an accent. But during the 1870s he argued that language instruction in primary schools should be bilingual. Teachers themselves should be bilingual and preferably of Pennsylvania German background so that they could both communicate with the children and relate to their background. Horne was also a leader in a developing movement to build pride in Pennsylvania German identity. He was very sensitive to the arrogance and prejudices of other Americans to the Pennsylvania Germans, including people he labeled as "English" (English-speaking people in Pennsylvania, especially those with English ancestry), and especially those whom he labeled as "Yankees" (people from New England and New York). Although these ethnic groups may not seem relevant today, they were seen as distinct and sometimes oppressive ethnic groups by Horne and many of his Pennsylvania German contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> Horne wanted to build a sense of Pennsylvania German pride in their heritage and language, but he also wanted Pennsylvania Germans to learn English and fully participate in the national society.<sup>7</sup>

In 1875, while he was at Keystone, Horne published the *Pennsylvania German Manual*.<sup>8</sup> The book was written to help teachers educate Pennsylvania German students. True to his educational philosophy of starting with the knowledge and background of students, Horne included several sections written in the Pennsylvania German language that were to be used as the basis for learning to read. In the preface to the *Manual*, Horne explained his reasons for writing the book. He wrote that for Pennsylvania Germans, "that the system of education generally pursued among this people admits of very great improvement, as far as it pertains to language exercises." Both English and standard or "High" German were foreign to these speakers of Pennsylvania German, and for these reasons they lagged in schools, although Horne argued that they were equal or better than their English and German peers in mathematics, where language was less important. For these people, Horne developed the *Manual*, written in Pennsylvania German, to help them to learn to read in Pennsylvania German and then to learn English. The book included guides to pronunciation and exercises that were designed to help a Pennsylvania German speak English without an accent. The sections written in Pennsylvania German included short histories of important Pennsylvania German leaders and examples of Pennsylvania German cultural practices. The *Manual* also included the first dictionary of the Pennsylvania German language. Horne's *Manual* was innovative in providing teachers with a textbook that allowed Pennsylvania Germans to read in their own language, and,

perhaps even more innovatively, the reading content itself developed knowledge of and pride in Pennsylvania German culture and history. Many leading Pennsylvania German educators of the time were advocates of bilingual education and teaching Pennsylvania German students how to read by having them translate back and forth between English and Pennsylvania German. In his *Manual*, Horne was trying to provide a textbook that would serve this purpose and build pride in an ethnic heritage and identity. Horne's *Manual* and educational philosophy lay behind the examination found in this copy-book. At a faculty meeting on 7 January 1876, the Keystone faculty approved using Horne's *Manual* as a textbook.

In 1876 very little had been written in the Pennsylvania German language. Literate Pennsylvania Germans wrote in standard (or High) German, or, increasingly as the nineteenth century progressed, in English. But by 1875, a movement was beginning that wanted to develop Pennsylvania German into a written literary language. There was a long history beginning in the early nineteenth century of short dialect letters appearing in newspapers, often with a folksy or humorous theme. In 1861, a Reformed pastor, Henry Harbaugh began publishing some poems in Pennsylvania German in a religious journal that he edited, *The Guardian*. A newspaper publisher, Edward Rauch, published several editions of a short-lived journal, *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*, starting in 1873 with sections that were in Pennsylvania German and Rauch translated "Rip Van Winkle" into Pennsylvania German (Horne contributed to Rauch's journal). Pennsylvania German was also receiving some academic attention. In 1872, S. S. Haldeman wrote a study of the grammar of the language. In 1869 Phebe Gibbons wrote down some observations of the Pennsylvania Germans (or "Dutch" as she referred to them) for *Atlantic Monthly* that were later turned into a book.<sup>9</sup> Horne was an important part of a successful movement to make Pennsylvania German into an accepted literary language. By 1900, a vibrant literature had developed using the Pennsylvania German language. There were short stories, poems, newspaper columns, songs and plays, all in the dialect.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of a standardized orthography posed a problem for anyone trying to write in Pennsylvania German, and remains a very contentious issue among many Pennsylvania German writers in the present. Some dialect writers, for example Harbaugh, used orthographies that were based upon High German. Other dialect writers, most notably and self-righteously Edward Rauch, used orthographies that were based upon English pronunciation. Horne was comfortable in standard or High German, and he eventually wrote a book in it.<sup>11</sup> But he did not use that language as the basis for the orthography in his *Manual*; instead, he developed a phonological orthography with diacritical marks, which was largely based upon English conventions. Horne's

orthography never gained much popularity among Pennsylvania Germans, although it was used in all the printings of his *Manual* (1875–76, 1895, 1905, and 1910). Horne's orthography, including the diacritic marks, is found in the examination book from 1876.

The examination questions in the copybook also reflect Horne's interests. Four of the five statements in the exam were Pennsylvania German proverbs. Horne had a special interest in Pennsylvania German proverbs and eventually published an article about them in the second annual *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society*.<sup>12</sup> The fifth statement refers to the state's Superintendent of Public Instruction, James Pyle Wickersham. Two of Wickersham's books, *School Economy* and *Method of Instruction*, were being used as textbooks during Horne's time at Keystone. Wickersham was, indeed, generally supportive of Pennsylvania Germans, as the examination statement suggests. After a speech about the problems of educating Pennsylvania Germans by Samuel Baer, who was superintendent of the Berks county schools at the time, at a teacher's convention in 1876, Wickersham commented about the Pennsylvania Germans:

I know these people, and can endorse every word that has been said in their favor. They are our brother Pennsylvanians, and have done much for the commonwealth as any other class of her citizens; no other has a better stock of common sense, or is more capable of accomplishing the great work before them; they build upon a good foundation. It is true that they have not made rapid intellectual advancement, because their attention has not been turned in that direction; but when their representative men do come into our schools and colleges, we find them standing high in their classes.<sup>13</sup>

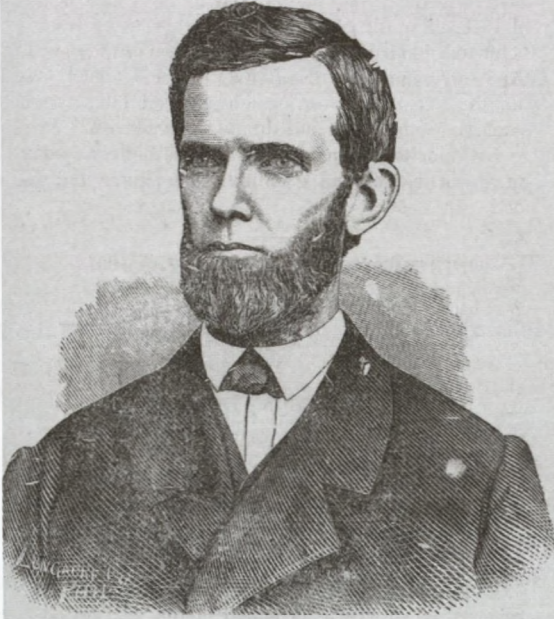
And during most of his time at Keystone, Horne seems to have supported Wickersham, who, as state superintendent, was in many respects Horne's supervisor and had the power to appoint several members of Keystone's board of trustees. In fact, in the first edition of his *Pennsylvania German Manual*, Horne included a likeness of Wickersham and on the next page the following statement:

#### SHOOLBÓS WIKÁRSHÁM

Dës bild uf d'r ön'rä seid fün dëm blawd is d'r soop'rintënd'r Wikärshäm. Där mön is d'r bös fün öl d' shoölä in d'r gönsä shtad. 'Ar is 'n örg feindlich'r un shmärdär mön un meind sei bisnës good. 'Ar is an'r fün dënä 'Englishä. woo m'r gleicht zu höwä in Pënsilfawni—woo sich nēt 'eibildä se warä shmärt'r ös anich ëb'r sunsht. 'Ar sawgt aw sëlw'r är war 'n deitsher, yusht sei forëltërä hēt'n 'n pawr hun'rt yor in 'Englönd g'shdübt, nüchdëm se Deitshlönd f'rlüsä hētä.



SHOOL-SÓCHÁ.



D'R SHTAD-SHOOLEÓS WIKÁRSHÁM.

From Horne's *Pennsylvania German Manual*, 1875.

SHOOLBÓS WIKÁRSHÁM.

Dēs bild uf d'r ön'rä seid fün dem bawd is d'r soop'rintend'r Wikárshám. Där mönis d'r bös fün öl d' shoollä in d'r gönsä shtad. 'Ar is 'n örg freindlich'r un shmärdär mön un meind sei bisnēs good. 'Ar is an'r fün dēnä 'Englishä. woo m'r gleicht zu hōwä in Pēnsilfawni—woo sich nēt 'eibildä se warä shmärt'r ös anich ēb'r sunsht. 'Ar sawgt aw sēlw'r är war 'n deitsher, yusht sei foreltērä hēt'n 'n pawr hun'rt yor in 'Englōnd g'shdübt, nüchdem se Deitslōnd f'rlūsä hētä.

From Horne's *Pennsylvania German Manual*, 1875.

### SCHOOL BOSS WICKERSHAM.

The picture from the other side of the page is of Superintendent Wickersham. This man is the head of all the schools in all the state. He is a very friendly and smart man and minds his business well. He is another of the English which we like to have in Pennsylvania—who does not fancy himself as smarter than anyone else. He also says that he himself was a German; it is just that his ancestors stopped for a few hundred years in England, after they had left Germany [translation by author].

Despite these laudatory comments, after Horne left Keystone, he became bitterly opposed to Wickersham and his policies as superintendent. Horne wrote several nasty editorials in his journal, the *National Educator*, criticizing Wickersham as state superintendent.<sup>14</sup> Horne's conflicts with Wickersham can be traced to several origins. Although a well-liked teacher, Horne had management problems at Keystone, including managing the behavior of some members of his own family that eventually led to his departure in 1877. Perhaps Horne came to resent Wickersham because he felt that Wickersham had influenced the events leading to his removal from Keystone. Moreover, Horne chafed under what he considered to be the demeaning and arrogant attitude of many of the "English," of which he considered Wickersham to be one, despite the nice words that he had for Wickersham in 1875.

Horne was as a leading regional educator, probably the most important Pennsylvania German in public education in the 1870s. But he was also strongly shaped by national processes, including the development of a public school system and the industrialization of the late nineteenth century. His career was based upon recent technological innovations coupled with the development of education as a profession. Printing presses and improved transportation systems allowed him to print and distribute his journal. Horne was also an educational entrepreneur. He was not only interested in educating the public, especially Pennsylvania Germans, but he was also trying to make a living by doing it. He earned money from his positions as an educator and he also had to sell both space to advertisers and subscriptions to the journal. The *Pennsylvania German Manual* was not only an educational tool, but was also a product to be marketed. At Keystone, Horne was not only developing an innovative bilingual program, he was also trying to keep his job as principal, sell his book, maybe even subscriptions to his journal, and help other Pennsylvania Germans get jobs as teachers.

The old copybook must also be understood for what did not happen. Although the overwhelming majority of the approximately 500 students enrolled at Keystone in 1876 were Pennsylvania German, only twenty-three of them took the examination in Pennsylvania German. There is no evidence

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that another examination was ever given again in Pennsylvania German. Horne's *Manual* went through four editions and achieved some popularity as a repository of information about Pennsylvania Germans, but, apparently, it was rarely used by teachers in their classrooms.<sup>15</sup>

Pennsylvania German intellectuals continued to be concerned about the prejudices of Yankees and English. They founded the Pennsylvania German Society in 1891 in order to build pride in their heritage (Horne was one of the founding members). And a dialect literature did develop which came to include newspaper columns, commentaries, poems, and plays, often with folksy, historical and humorous themes. But Pennsylvania German educators and intellectuals, including Horne, came to advocate the use of English as the national language and as the primary language of instruction in their schools. After about 1880, Pennsylvania German was not taken seriously as a language of instruction in schools, even by those who advocated its preservation in the homes, newspapers and a literature. By 1900, most Pennsylvania German educators, including Horne himself, were advocating that teachers not use any Pennsylvania German in the classroom, and immerse students in English-only instruction, as the best method for teaching Pennsylvania German children.<sup>16</sup>

The copybook was part of a short-lived nineteenth-century experiment in bilingual education that was abandoned. Nevertheless it reflects the long and continuing history of tensions between diversity and assimilation in American education and society. Many years later in the late twentieth century, when this nineteenth-century movement for bilingual education among Pennsylvania Germans was long forgotten, there were new efforts to start multilingual educational programs and to develop curricula that accommodated culturally diverse groups. Like Horne over one hundred years earlier, modern advocates of bilingual education and cultural diversity emphasize not only language use but also pride in a person's unique cultural heritage. And we all continue to struggle with the tensions between integration into a national society while still recognizing the wealth of our diversity, both in the past and perhaps in the future.

Today, as we celebrate Earl Haag's scholarship, the overwhelming majority of people with Pennsylvania German ancestors speak English with little or no knowledge of the language of their ancestors.<sup>17</sup> Professor Haag has dedicated his life to calling attention to the richness of the Pennsylvania German language and its expression. Perhaps, we can find new ways to express and preserve our ethnicity, while still participating in a rapidly changing national society. Certainly, Professor Haag has given us materials for doing so.

*Kutztown University of Pennsylvania*  
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Notes

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Darlene Moyer and the late Bill Yurvati for calling my attention to this old copybook.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Ermentrout, "How to Teach German Children the English Language," *Pennsylvania School Journal* 12, no. 3 (September 1863): 80–84.

<sup>3</sup> See Lee Graver, "Beacon on the Hill: The Centennial History of Kutztown State College," *The Kutztown Bulletin* 99, no. 1, Rohrbach Library, Kutztown University; see also *Centennial Catalogue and Circular of the Keystone State Normal School, 1875–76* (Urick and Gehring's Steam Job Press, 1876), 21–22.

<sup>4</sup> Horne's journal underwent several name changes during the forty-two years that he published it. Throughout, I will refer to it as the *National Educator*, which was its last and best known name. A fairly complete set can be found at the Schwenkfelder Library in Pennsburg, PA.

<sup>5</sup> For information about Horne, see William W. Donner, "'We Are What We Make of Ourselves': Abraham Reeser Horne and the Education of Pennsylvania Germans," *Pennsylvania Magazine of Biography and History* 124, no. 4 (2000): 521–46; and "Abraham Reeser Horne: To the Manor Born," *Der Reggebooge* (Journal of the Pennsylvania German Society) 33, no. 1–2 (1999): 3–17.

<sup>6</sup> A contemporaneous discussion of the pejorative way in which the term "Yankee" was used by Pennsylvania Germans can be found in Phebe Earle Gibbons, *Pennsylvania Dutch and Other Essays*, reprinted with a new introduction by Don Yoder (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2001, originally published in 1872, 1874, 1882), 11, 394.

<sup>7</sup> See Donner 1999 and 2000.

<sup>8</sup> A. R. Horne, *Pennsylvania German Manual, for Pronouncing, Speaking and Writing English* (Kutztown, 1875); later editions were published in Allentown in 1896, 1905, 1910.

<sup>9</sup> Gibbons, *Pennsylvania Dutch*. In an introduction to Stackpole's new edition, Don Yoder makes the point that Gibbons should be considered a forerunner of the twentieth-century ethnographer.

<sup>10</sup> See Harry Hess Reichard, *Pennsylvania-German Dialect Writings and their Writers*, Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society 26 (Lancaster: New Era Printing Company, 1918); Earl F. Robacker, *Pennsylvania German Literature: Changing Trends from 1683–1942* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943).

<sup>11</sup> A. R. Horne, *Memoirs of Rev. Joshua Yeager, 1802–1882/ Das Leben und Wirken von Pater Josua Jager, Evangelische-Lutherischdem Prediger* (Allentown, 1889).

<sup>12</sup> "Proverbs and Sayings of the Pennsylvania Germans," in *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings* 2 (Lancaster, 1894): 47–54.

<sup>13</sup> *Pennsylvania School Journal* 26 (September 1877): 114. For a discussion of Wickersham's role in Pennsylvania education, see Paul K. Adams, "James P. Wickersham on Education and Crime in Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of Biography and History* 104, no. 4 (October 1980): 411–33.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, editorial in the *National Educator* 18, no. 7 (April 1879): 104, and *National Educator* 18, no. 5 (February 1879): 78.

<sup>15</sup> See Reichard, *Pennsylvania-German Dialect Writings*, 127.

<sup>16</sup> See Donner 1999 and 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites still speak Pennsylvania German. But the language is rarely spoken by people in the "fancier" church groups (Lutherans and German Reformed), who are the overwhelming majority of Pennsylvania Germans.