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The Thomas Royce Brendle Collection of Pennsylvania German Folklore: An Introduction

Thomas Royce Brendle was born on September 15, 1889, on a farm at Schaefferstown in Heidelberg Township, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. He died in Allentown, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, on September 1, 1966. Brendle attended the public schools of his native village, was tutored by his uncle, the lawyer A. S. Brendle, and completed the first three years of college at Albright College, then located in the neighboring town of Myerstown. He completed his undergraduate work at Franklin and Marshall College and was graduated in 1911 from the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church (Brendle, T., *Herald* 3.2: 1). Both institutions are located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His fifty-year pastorate in the Reformed Church in the United States (later the Evangelical and Reformed Church, currently the United Church of Christ) placed him in daily contact with the language and lore of the Pennsylvania Germans. Thomas Royce Brendle was frequently called "the dean of the Pennsylvania German folklorists" by those contemporaries well acquainted with his work (Korson 287).

It was natural for young "Roy," as he was known in Schaefferstown, to prepare himself for the Christian ministry. His grandfather, Daniel D. Brendle, had served as the superintendent of the Reformed Sunday School in Schaefferstown for forty-four years (*The History of St. Paul's Church* 141). It was Grandfather Brendle who awakened the interest of his grandson in the flora and fauna of the countryside. T. R. Brendle's notes tell us that he frequently accompanied his grandfather on excursions to the neighboring hills. This early exposure to the plant names and plant lore of the Pennsylvania Germans later developed into a lifelong preoccupation with the Pennsylvania German dialect and folklore (Brendle, T., *Perkiomen* 1.4: 61; Milbury 53-54). During the long years in the ministry Thomas Royce Brendle's workshop was the study in his village parsonage, the homes of his parishioners and the social centers of the community.

T. Royce Brendle, as he wrote his name until his father's death, began his ministry in a mission church in Abilene, Kansas, where he served for only two years—he was paid barely enough to support his wife and first child. In 1913 he responded to a call from the Old Goshenhoppen Charge of the Reformed Church, which is located in the Upper Perkiomen Valley of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania (Brendle, T., *Herald* 5.5: 1). During this thirteen-year pastorate (1913-1926) the young minister had the time to botanize in the region, interrogate his parishioners and establish productive relationships with others interested in local history (Brendle, T., *Perkiomen* 1.1: 1). From 1926 to the year of his retirement (1961) Brendle ministered to the Egypt Charge of the Reformed Church, which is located in northern Lehigh County, Pennsylvania.

As we view in retrospect the unique career of Thomas Royce Brendle, German-American folklorist, we should not lose sight of the fact that he was not unique among the Pennsylvania German clergymen of his day in his ability to speak the Pennsylvania German dialect fluently—hence his excellent rapport with his parishioners. There were other clergymen in southeastern Pennsylvania fluent in the dialect who conducted High German worship services on a regular basis, just as *Parre* Brendle had in the first decade of his ministry (Brendle, T., *Herald* 1.1: 2). Brendle's colleagues had the same daily contacts with their Pennsylvania German parishioners and neighbors. The central and most significant fact is that Brendle alone observed, listened, remembered, questioned *and then* recorded (initially on any piece of paper handy, later in his notebooks) Pennsylvania German words, idioms, expressions, proverbs, riddles, folk beliefs, folk cures, etc. This he did week after week, year after year, for more than a quarter of a century (ca. 1925-1960) (Brendle, T., *Herald* 2.5: 4; Lambert xxvii).

During the second quarter of the twentieth century ''Tom'' Brendle—after his father's death, who had been known as ''Tom'' Brendle all his life, Thomas Royce Brendle referred to himself as ''Tom'' and began to write his name as ''Thomas R. Brendle'' and no longer as ''T. Royce Brendle''—filled approximately ninety loose-leaf notebooks with his numbered observations and recollections, and subsequently other related data. Eventually Brendle typed many of his previously handwritten notes, so that today part of the collection, which is now in the possession of Historic Schaefferstown, Inc., is in Brendle's hand, part is in typescript.

Tom Brendle would collect his information on his daily rounds. For example, at Bible class meetings; on personal visits in the homes of his parishioners; on fishing trips; at a performance of a dialect play in the local high school; from members of his church consistories; from the caretaker of the Egypt cemetery, which was located behind the parsonage in Egypt; frequently from a neighbor, Mary Koch; from recollections of things said by his father and grandfather Brendle; at a funeral; at the Laurys Sunday School picnic (on July 11, 1942); from his old friend and collaborator ''Pumbernickle Bill'' (William S. Troxell), who wrote a regular dialect column from 1926 to 1957 in the Allentown *Morning Call*,

a daily newspaper; and from notes made from the manuscripts of radio broadcasts in the dialect by "Pumbernickle Bill" on radio station WSAN in Allentown ("Funeral Rites"; Korson 357).

An Overview of the Contents of the Brendle Collection

The Brendle Collection proper consists of ninety-three loose-leaf notebooks. The items numbered in a notebook may be as low as 236 or as high as 2,792. For instance, volume one contains 1,804 numbered items recorded on 249 pages. (Brendle did not number his pages.) The entire collection contains approximately 55,000 numbered entries, even though Brendle's last numbered entry bears the number "57,124." Brendle's hand-written and typed notes are spread over approximately 24,000 pages.

All these figures will have to remain approximations, for Brendle's numbering system was never exact. In some sections of the collection he renumbered items. As a result there were duplications and omissions of numbers. During the years of his retirement when the collection was with him in Hamburg, New York, he continued to work with his collection by making additions and corrections. Some of these additions were added to the numbered items or placed in the margins. These additions often spilled over onto blank pages and were not necessarily related to the neighboring entries. We must assume, therefore, that those additions and "corrections"—which are somewhat erratic and occasionally barely legible—must have been made between 1961, the year of his retirement from the active ministry, and 1966, the year he entered a nursing home in Allentown, where he died on September 1, 1966.

Since Brendle usually numbered each item as he recorded it, there was no need for him to number his pages. Sometimes he wrote on both sides of a sheet. When he typed his notes, he used only one side of the sheet. Brendle was fairly faithful to his original numbering system in the first sixty-one volumes. These volumes contain material recorded between May of 1936, the month volume one was begun, and February of 1961. (We have reason to believe that Brendle began making scattered notes at least ten years earlier, that is about the time he took up the pastorate in Egypt in Lehigh County.)

The final thirty volumes of the Brendle Collection contain few numbered entries. It is clear that in his retirement in Hamburg, New York, Brendle was no longer rooted in the fertile Dutch soil of southeastern Pennsylvania. Hence, it is the first two-thirds of the collection which interests us the most, for in those sixty volumes Brendle accomplished what he set out to do. We quote in its entirety the foreword Brendle wrote for the first volume of his collected notes:

> In my associations with my people, I had heard many traditions, proverbs, expressions, etc. As the years passed I found that I was forgetting much that I had heard and was having only a faint memory of many things that at one time I knew well. Also such notes as I had made were not assembled.

So in the year 1936 I began to make notes on all the lore that I heard. Day after day, I would make notes, as I heard matter which I felt would be worthwhile in making a study of the Pennsylvania Germans.

I wrote down daily what I heard and as I heard it. Often I noted the name of the informant; also my recollections which came back to my remembrance. There are frequent duplications. This is due to the circumstance that I did not trust to a memory of what I had written. I feel now that I should have noted more duplications for a study of frequency of occurrence and for variations and current interpretations of the original.

I have loosely followed Lambert in spelling the dialectal words.

When this collection was approaching 10,000 items, I felt that I should type the notes, for many of them had been written with pencil, and the numbering, especially in the first volume, was not consecutive. In recopying the notes I was careful to make a faithful copy, adding little that was not in the original. Sometimes, where my notes were not clear to me, I have added a question mark.

If I should not be able to use this collected material, I feel that the work has not been in vain, for I know that sometime someone will find it an ample source for study of the Pennsylvania Germans.

Everything unless otherwise noted was heard by me. I have used no printed matter, unless so indicated. All the material is what I personally heard. That should be remembered. Others may have heard things differently. This is what *I* heard and saw.

Recopied 1941. Am keeping the originals.

The final third of the collection appears to have been assembled during Brendle's retirement in Hamburg, New York. He was no longer in daily contact with other dialect speakers other than Mrs. Brendle. He was experiencing the infirmities of advancing age. Thus there is a marked difference in the contents of the later volumes. Here we will find Brendle's copy of Marcus Bachman Lambert's Pennsylvania German dictionary, which was first published by the Pennsylvania German Society in 1924 (Lambert). In this copy are many additional dialect words which Lambert had not recorded. Since Brendle had assisted Lambert in the compilation of his dictionary, it is not surprising that Brendle made copious notes on lexical items as he heard them or as they occurred to him (Lambert xxvii). In our revision of Lambert's dictionary we are leaning heavily on Brendle's notes. The later volumes of the Brendle Collection are especially valuable for the inserted material. Here one finds letters, some to Brendle, some to "Pumbernickle Bill" (William S. Troxell), who died almost ten years before Brendle ("Funeral Rites"). After Troxell's death in 1957 Mrs. Troxell turned over to Brendle lists of important information in the dialect which had been sent to Troxell by those who listened to his radio broadcasts.

One of the Brendle notebooks contains what appears to be an English translation of the famous powwowing book, Hohmann's *Long Lost Friend* (Yoder 1976). In these volumes we find genealogical information on the Brendles and related families. Volume seventy-one contains a copy of Brendle's dialect play, *Die Mutter,* as performed on October 19, 1934, in Hershey, Pennsylvania (Buffington 194-222). A wheelwright's

account book of the years 1768-97, which was copied in 1941, has been preserved here. A number of these later volumes contain the notes Brendle had made for a powwow book he was compiling prior to his final illness. Of especial interest are the folktales submitted by radio listeners in 1942 to the regular radio broadcasts by "Pumbernickle Bill" (Brendle and Troxell, 1944).

One of the most valuable documents which was copied verbatim by Brendle (in September and October of 1953) and preserved in his collection is Edna Hurst's diary of the year 1900. The seventeen-year-old Edna Hurst was the youngest daughter of the only physician in Talmage, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. After she had taught in Arizona, Edna returned to Lancaster County and completed the teacher training program at Millersville State Normal School in 1911. Edna's son was unaware of the existence of the diary until a copy was presented to him recently. The 1900 diary of Edna Hurst Wenger with annotations will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Lancaster County.*

Illustrations of Some of the Categories Represented in the Brendle Collection

The very first entry in volume one reads as follows:

> A child, visiting in a friend's or in a neighbor's house should not accept the first invitation to eat at the table with the family; it should wait for a second or third invitation. (This belief Brendle encountered in his home, Lebanon County, and in Montgomery County, where he lived for thirteen years.)

This entry is expanded upon with the following explanation:

> Lest the child give the impression that it does not get enough to eat at home; to show no greediness. This also was the way of many grown-ups. Aunt Jane, my wife's aunt, 83 years old, almost always waits for a second request at the table for a second helping.

At this point Brendle quotes the remark of the host who has already invited the guest to the table:

> "Ich hab en eemol gheese esse; sell waar genunk. Er is ken Kind, as mer en meh wie eemol heese muss." (I invited him once; that was enough. He is no child that one has to invite him more than once.)
>
> There is also the feeling that the first invitation is due to courtesy, the second comes from real desire. "Do waard mer net fer's zwettmol gheese sei." (One doesn't wait to be invited the second time.) (Brendle indicates that he has heard this expression frequently.)

Entry number one concludes with two anecdotes, typical of stories which floated around of persons arriving for a visit at mealtime:

> (A) One person came as the family was gathering around the table: "Hock dich hie un ess mit," (Sit down and eat.) said the man of the house. "Nee, ich will net; bin net hungrich," (No, I don't want to; I'm not hungry.) answered the person. "Ach, kumm aan; ess mit," (Oh, come on; eat with us.) said the householder. "Nee, nee!" answered the

visitor. "Ya, *well,* dann!" said the householder and the family took to eating.—The visitor, who really was hungry, watched them, and after a bit, said, "Esse is awwer aa gut." (Eating is good too.) Or in another version: "Es Esse schmackt awwer gut." (My, but the food smells good.)

(B) A little boy came to a home at dinnertime when the family was gathered around the table. A conversation similar to the one above took place. The hunger of the boy increased as the dinner progressed. As the pie was being passed around, he could restrain himself no longer and he cried out: "Seller Pei muss awwer gut sei!" (That pie must really be good!)

In both instances the visitor was given something to eat.

As is frequently the case in Brendle's notes, one piece of information seems to remind either Brendle or the informant of a related bit of information. Item number one is followed by several table prayers and a favorite bedtime prayer. This of course provokes a parody:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
Upon my little trundle bed,
If I should die before I wake,
How would I know I am dead?

Or: If I should die before I wake,
Good-bye to mother's buckwheat cake.

One parody, of course, reminds one of another. This one is on "Nearer, my God, to Thee":

Nero, my dog, has fleas,
Nero has fleas.
No matter what soap I use,
Nero has fleas.

Item number fifteen recommends: "When leaving a team of horses alone in a field, turn them away from the buildings and they will remain at the spot and not run away." This bit of lore reminds Brendle of the dialect expression: "der Blug verisse" meaning "to wreck a plow" (by the ploughshare catching under a stump or under a large stone). Related is the expression: "die Mehmaschien verrisse" meaning "to wreck the mowing machine, when the cutting bar hits a stump, a post, etc. and the horses have run away or are pulling too fast."

Much weather lore has found its way into the Brendle Collection. This item is the very first bit of weather lore in the collection: "Wann die Hund odder Katze Graas fresse, gebt's Rege." (When the dogs or the cats eat grass, there will be rain.)

The Brendle Collection is a storehouse of proverbs and proverbial expressions. They begin to appear very early in the first volume. For instance, "Was sich zwett, dritt sich." (That which occurs twice, will occur a third time.) "Two funerals in short succession in a congregation portend a third one."

Here is a tale recorded in the first volume which Brendle heard from the lips of his father as well as from his grandfather:

In the "bottom field" of the old Scheetz farm on the edge of Schaefferstown, where the sensational Scheetz murder took place, a man by the name of Houser of "Kannadaa" (Canada), the southern part of Schaefferstown, "hot Schtecheise gfischt ee Nacht." (was gig fishing one night) ("The Tragedy of old Schaefferstown"). Around midnight he heard what he took to be the horses of the murderers galloping around the field. The riders called out, "Whoa! Whoa!" Frightened he started for home and going through the woods he heard a voice calling, "Wuh-hie! Wuh-hie!" In his fright he answered, "Wuh-hie!" and thereupon a weight as of a two-bushel bag of wheat fell upon his back. The weight lay upon him all the way home, until unable to walk upright, he staggered against the door, where he collapsed.

Another tale from Schaefferstown:

Dawson Hetrick, a schoolmate of mine in Schaefferstown, told me that one night his father and others went to a crossroad to mould magic bullets. While engaged in their work, one happened to look up and there suspended over them hung a millstone. In fright they rushed from under the stone and ran pell-mell all the way home. "If they had not been scared and had kept on with their work, they would have succeeded in moulding the bullets," said Dawson Hetrick.

"Der Eewich Yaeger" (the eternal hunter) has been at least heard of by every Pennsylvania Dutchman in the past. One night Tom Brendle's grandfather and Tom's uncle were out hunting. They were on the ridge that led back to "Walniss Brunne" (Walnut Spring) near Schaefferstown. As they went along the ridge, they heard "der Eewich Yaeger" on the slope across the "Haschdaal" (Deer Valley). They immediately turned back and went home, for it was dangerous to be out at night when "der Eewich Yaeger" was abroad. This could mean death or disappearance.

Let us skip ahead to volume twelve, which contains almost 3,000 numbered items. The information in this volume was gathered in or near the town of Egypt in Lehigh County from March 6 to August 13, 1942, a five-month period during World War II, when travel was restricted. The folklore assembled and recorded in this volume represents a good cross section of the various categories of folkloristic and linguistic information which Brendle recorded in the early volumes of the collection. These were notes made when Pastor Brendle was in his most productive years and at a time when the generation born during the last quarter of the nineteenth century—a period when the Pennsylvania German culture was the dominant one in many of the rural sections of southeastern Pennsylvania—was well represented amongst Brendle's informants. In this fact lies the uniqueness of the Brendle Collection. Brendle assembled his collection from a generation which knew the dialect and the older ways well. As was already pointed out, Brendle grew up in a community (Schaefferstown), which was thoroughly Pennsylvania German during the period of his childhood and youth (A. S. Brendle). He lived for almost half a century in two areas, which were at the time he served them as pastor, 1913-1961, thoroughly Pennsylvania Dutch. Whatever reservations one may harbor concerning

Brendle's technique or manner of organizing or recording his material, the salient fact to bear in mind is that he took a lively interest in the ethnology of his own people, the Pennsylvania Germans, and listened, observed, recalled and recorded! (For example, Brendle and Troxell with the help of Paul Wieand were the first to go into the field and mechanically record the folksongs of the Pennsylvania Dutch) (Brendle and Troxell, "Pennsylvania German Songs"). This act of filling notebook after notebook, year after year, constitutes a special kind of *Kulturtat*, which has yet to be fully appreciated by the scholarly world (Botkin 807; Dorson, "Pennsylvania Dutchmen" 110).

Here are a few more examples of some of the categories to be found in volume twelve:

1. **Proverbs and proverbial expressions:** "Sie sin aa Mensche." (They are also human.) "Ich hab aa mei Menscherecht." (I too have my human rights.) "Ich bin aa en Mensch." (I'm a human being also.)

2. **Riddles:** "Was is des? Sex Zoll lang mit me Kopp un die ganz Welt eschdimiert's."—"En Daaler." (What is six inches long with a head and revered by the entire world?—A dollar bill.) (from Mrs. Mertz in Orefield)

3. **Weather lore:** "When snow falls, it is said, 'Sie robbe die Gens in Deitschland un schicke die Feddre rei.' " (They're plucking the geese in Germany and sending us the feathers.)

4. **Counting out rime:** "Eene beene dunke funke / Raabi schnabbi dibbi dabbe / Ulla bulla Ros / Ib ab aus / Du bischt aus." (from Mrs. Moyer, Egypt)

5. **Folk cure:** "For whooping cough: 'Aus me blohe Glass drinke.'—'Mei Mammi hot immer en bloh Glaas ghat fer die Kinner raus drinke, wann die Blohhuuschde ghadde hen.' " (My mom always had a blue glass for the children to drink out of whenever they had whooping cough.) (from Mrs. Charles Fries, Kreidersville)

6. **Seasonal lore:** "At New Year one should eat pork and not chicken, 'wann mer vorkumme will in die Welt.' (if one wishes to get ahead in the world.) When a chicken scratches, it works backward, but when a hog roots, it works forward. So if you would go forward in the world, eat pork, particularly at New Year; also at Christmas." (Mrs. Fries)

7. **Star lore:** " 'Wann mer die Schtanne seht falle, schtarbt ebber in die Freindschaft.' (When one sees the stars fall, someone will die in the family.) As a protective action, close your eyes or look away." (Fries)

8. **Anecdote about a clergyman:** "A 'Parre' was driving along when he came to a little boy playing with a 'Kiehdreck.' 'Was hoscht du?'—"Wees net!'—'Weescht net was sell is?'—'Nee!'—'Sell is en Kiehdreck!'—'Guck, do kann mer sehne was die Lanning dutt. Ich hab net gwisst eb's en Bulledreck odder en Kiehdreck is!' " (What've you got there?—Don't know!—You don't know what that is?—No!—That's a cow flop!—Well, one can surely see what education does for one. I didn't know whether it was a bull flop or a cow flop!) (Oscar Laub)

9. **Ascension Day lore:** "There was made for an old woman a nightcap, 'en Schlofkapp.' This happened to have been made on 'Himmelfaahrdaag.' (Ascension Day) One day storms came 'un sin yuscht iwwer em Haus gschtanne un sin net weckgezoge. Es hot arig gedunnert un gegracht.' (and remained over the house and did not move on. There was terrible thundering and cracking.) The persons in the

house became frightened. Finally, they remembered the old belief and that the cap had been made on 'Himmelfaahrdaag.' So they took the cap and hung it on the washline out in the yard. Then there was an awful clap of thunder. The cap was torn to shreds—and the storm moved on." (Brendle, 1951)

If space permitted it would be possible to retell a tall tale or one of the folktales about *Jenneveefaa, Die drei Brieder* or of *Der Buh und der Schwatzkinschdler* (Yoder, 1971b). Our last example of typical lore from the Brendle Collection is a tale involving Eulenspiegel and a preacher. This account was copied by Brendle from the manuscript for the February 18, 1942, radio broadcast of "Pumbernickle Bill." The story was submitted by James Stuber of Cherryville, Pennsylvania. We quote "Pumbernickle Bill":

> Der James secht, der Ira Bickel hett sich mohl verdingt zu me Parre als Gnecht. Sunndaags maryets hett der Parre der Ira nausgschickt fer sei Weggel schmiere fer noch der Karich geh. Der Ira hett gsaat, er deet, un waer naus un hett der Wagge all eigschmiert mit Waggeschmier vun eem End bis ans anner. Wie der Parre nauskumme waer fer fattgeh, hett er der Ira gfrogt, was er geduh. Noh hett der Ira gsaat: "Ei, der Wagge gschmiert, wie du gsaat hoscht as ich sott."—"Ya," hett der Parre gsaat, "awwer du hoscht en dadde schmiere solle!" un gewisse noch der Ex vum Weggel. "Schur," hett der Ira gsaat, "ich hett aa, awwer ich hab net dadde draakumme kenne!" (Beam 11-14)
>
> (James said that Eulenspiegel had hired himself out to a preacher. Sunday morning the preacher sent Till out to grease his buggy before he went to church. Till said he would and went out and greased the buggy all over—from end to end. When the preacher was ready to leave, he asked Till what he had done. Till replied, "Why, greased the buggy as you said I should."—"Yes," said the preacher, "but you should have greased it there!" and pointed to the axles of the buggy.—"Sure," said Till, "I would have, too, but I couldn't reach in there!")

The Thomas Royce Brendle Collection of Pennsylvania German Folklore stands alone as a record of German-American folklife (Dorson 1959; Klees 450; Yoder 1971a). In the last quarter of the twentieth century the ranks of those who know the dialect well and recall the old ways are thinning rapidly. It would not be possible this late in the century—even with a large staff of trained field workers and unlimited financial resources—to duplicate Brendle's solitary achievement. His folklore collection is his monument. He truly was "the dean of the Pennsylvania German folklorists"!

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