

# H-Net Reviews

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Lester W. J. Seifert. *A Word Atlas of Pennsylvania German*. Edited by Mark L. Loudon, Howard Martin, and Joseph C. Salmons. Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2001. viii + 121 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-924119-02-6.

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## A Long-Awaited Gift

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Lester Wilhelm Julius (“Smoky”) Seifert, one of the most prominent scholars of the German language in the United States, died in September 1996 at the age of 81. In his obituary, Donald A. Becker calls Seifert’s 1941 dissertation on “The Pennsylvania German Dialect Spoken in the Counties of Lehigh and Berks,” co-authored with Carroll E. Reed under the guidance of Hans Kurath at Brown University, “a work that laid the foundation for modern Pennsylvania German studies.”[1] At the same time, Becker announces the impending posthumous publication of Seifert’s *Word Atlas of Pennsylvania German*, data collection for which began with Seifert’s and Reed’s fieldwork in 1940-41.

More than half a century after the fieldwork, students of Pennsylvania German finally have this long-awaited work at their disposal. Published by the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and edited by Mark L. Loudon, Howard Martin, and Joseph C. Salmons, this handsome atlas provides the most complete cartographical information available for Pennsylvania German. It complements Reed’s and Seifert’s *Linguistic Atlas of Pennsylvania German*, which was published privately in Marburg, Germany in 1954 and has been notoriously hard to obtain in recent years.[2]

In the preface to the *Word Atlas*, Joe Salmons states that the goal of this publication was “to present as broad

and detailed a picture as possible of Pennsylvania German vocabulary, in its historical and grammatical contexts” and “to make the volume informative to a broad reading public, relevant to as many scholars as possible, while also accessible to laypeople” (p. vii). These objectives have been met in a most impressive way.

The volume opens with two biographical sketches of Seifert (pp. 1-3; 3-6), followed by an informative essay by Mark Loudon on the development of Pennsylvania German linguistics with particular attention to Seifert’s role in this process (pp. 7-52). Four original articles on the vocabulary of Pennsylvania German, one by Reed and Seifert and three by Seifert (pp. 53-111), precede the main part of the volume. This third part, prefaced by a list of informant biographies (pp. 112-21), consists of 173 maps detailing the distribution of lexical items in the Pennsylvania German heartland.

Howard Martin’s “Professional Perspective” of Seifert follows the scholar’s career from his origin in a low-German speech community in Wisconsin to his thirty-nine years of teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Numerous honors and rewards after Seifert’s official retirement in 1985 document his many contributions to German studies in general and to Pennsylvania German studies in particular. The second biography, entitled “A Personal Perspective,” is authored by Seifert’s daughter Suzanne Seifert Treichel. Among the highlights of this entertaining essay are some interesting details of

Seifert's and Reed's fieldwork in 1940-41 and of Seifert's last trip to Marburg in 1996.

Mark Loudon's essay entitled "The Development of Pennsylvania German Linguistics within the Context of General Dialectology and Linguistic Theory" is an excellent *Forschungsbericht* on Pennsylvania German linguistics, documenting the prominent role Seifert played in the emergence of current sociolinguistic approaches out of earlier dialectological studies. In fact, Loudon claims that modern sociolinguistics would be unthinkable "in the absence of the empirical and conceptual foundations laid by dialectologists" like Kurath, Haugen, Weinreich, Seifert, and others (p. 14). The article goes on to depict the development of Pennsylvania German linguistics from the pre-Seifert/Reed period (1872-1924) to the emergence of American linguistics in Seifert's and Reed's generation. The novelty of Seifert's and Reed's work was that the production of the *Word Atlas* was not an end in itself but was considered an empirical basis of future interpretative work. Concepts like language contact, bilingualism, language maintenance and shift, and language death—all still relevant in modern sociolinguistics—played an important role in Seifert's and Reed's approach. In addition, fieldwork for the *Word Atlas* marked the beginning of a systematic investigation of variation within Pennsylvania German. The seventy-six interviews conducted in 1940-41 and the eleven interviews to follow after World War II led to a number of publications by Seifert and Reed, which Loudon discusses in great detail. The author goes on to give an overview of the direction Pennsylvania German linguistics has taken since 1940, most notably in the work of scholars like Huffines, Enninger, Raith, and Loudon himself. While Seifert's and Reed's work focused on the Pennsylvania German varieties spoken by the nonsectarians (who formed the overwhelming majority of speakers at the time of their fieldwork), the emphasis has shifted to sociolinguistic issues arising from the increasing prevalence of varieties of sectarian Pennsylvania German. It is in this area that Loudon identifies a number of research desiderata for the future. Loudon's essay includes a comprehensive bibliography of literature relevant to Pennsylvania German linguistics. The only quibble one might have is that the latest works listed are from 1997.

The first of four original articles reprinted in this volume is Reed's and Seifert's "A Study of the Pennsylvania German Dialect Spoken in the Counties of Lehigh and Berks," originally published in *Modern Language Quarterly* 9 (1948). In it, the authors show the importance of regional distribution of Pennsylvania German, which

had been ignored by research up to that time. Information on the 1940-41 fieldwork is followed by, among other things, a brief history of the German settlement of Pennsylvania, a summary of the vitae of the informants, and a reprint of the workbook. The second article is Seifert's "Lexical Differences between Four Pennsylvania German Regions," reprinted from the *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society Yearbook* 11 (1946). This article provides lists of lexical data for eight types of regional distribution in the four areas Lehigh, Berks, Lancaster, and Susquehanna. Seifert concludes that Berks is a transitional area between the core areas Lehigh and Lancaster, while Susquehanna, as a later colonial area, is overall characterized by less unified usage. Seifert's article "The Word Geography of Pennsylvania German: Extent and Causes" first appeared in 1971 in *The German Language in America: A Symposium*, edited by Glenn G. Gilbert. It includes a useful discussion of the settlement history and numbers of speakers of Pennsylvania German. Seifert explains that the leveling processes, which were probably completed around 1800, did not result in complete homogeneity. While the central region (Berks) played a key role in these processes, the south (Lancaster) preserved more Swiss elements; the northwest (Susquehanna) as a secondary settlement is marked by a higher percentage of English loanwords. Attached to the article is an interesting exchange among Seifert and various conference participants reacting to his presentation. Incidentally, on p. 85 Seifert announces the publication of a "*Wordatlas of Pennsylvania German*" by Reed and Seifert, "containing 144 linguistic maps," which "lie ready for duplication at the Forschungsinstitut fuer deutsche Sprache (*Deutscher Sprachatlas*) of the University of Marburg" and the introduction of which "will be completed in 1970." Although it took thirty-one more years until the atlas finally appeared, this article provides a perfect description of the first 144 maps. The final original article by Seifert, entitled "The Diminutives of Pennsylvania German," was originally published in *Monatshefte* 39 (1947). With eight diminutive suffixes in the singular and ten in the plural, Pennsylvania German shows a high degree of variety. Seifert explains this with settlement history, noting that Lancaster with its strong Swiss and Alemannic influence shows the least variety, while Susquehanna as a later colonial area is marked by the greatest variety.

The maps are prefaced by informant biographies, ordered by geographic area. With regard to their origin, the 173 maps fall into two groups. Maps 1 through 144 were created by Seifert during his stay at the University of Marburg in 1966-67. Maps 145 through 173 are a se-

lection reprinted from the ninety maps of the *Linguistic Atlas of Pennsylvania German*. The original numbers of the latter are given on p. vi. The design and size of the maps ensures a high level of clarity and readability.

Errata in this volume are very infrequent and do not typically affect the contents. Altogether, the editors have bestowed upon the students of Pennsylvania German dialectology a gift that will be cherished for many years to come. Lester W. J. Seifert would be proud of them!

## Notes

[1]. Donald A. Becker, "Lester Wilhelm Julius ('Smoky') Seifert, 1915-1996," *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literature* 9.1 (1997), pp. 113-16.

[2]. Carroll E. Reed and Lester W. Seifert, *A Linguistic Atlas of Pennsylvania German* (Marburg/Lahn: private, 1954).

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