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**Review of Auker, Kenneth. 2013. *Keeping the Trust: Issues Surrounding the Formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church*. Ephrata, PA: Eastern Mennonite Publications. Pp. 320.**

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## Book Reviews

Review of Auker, Kenneth. 2013. *Keeping the Trust: Issues Surrounding the Formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church*. Ephrata, PA: Eastern Mennonite Publications. Pp. 320.

By John L. Ruth

*Keeping the Trust*, written by Kenneth Auker, fulfills its stated purposes: to preserve, explain, and interpret the founding story and convictions of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, in order to “maintain a vision for the future.” As such, it is a useful book for readers both within and beyond the EPMC. It places on record and gives access to a conservative view of defining events that in a half century are becoming “blurred” memories. Whereas “mere memories” may well have become—for many potential readers within and beyond the fellowship—mere curiosities, it freshly articulates convictions once deeply and more widely held among traditional “Old” Mennonites in America.

The account is an earnest interweaving of history and apologia. Individual testimonies scattered through the text personalize the issues. With narrative touches that aid understanding, the book’s concentration on events of a half-decade allows for tenfold more specific information on its subject than available in the few pages given to it in the Lancaster Mennonite Conference’s own history, *The Earth is the Lord’s* (2001), which overviewed four centuries.

My reviewer’s point of view draws on a youth spent in the context of a spirituality resembling very closely that described in *Keeping the Trust*. Sent from the Franconia Conference area by conscientious parents to four years (1944-48) at the Lancaster Mennonite (High) School, I became familiar with the protective piety of Principal J. Paul Graybill and heard devout chapel speakers such as Amos Horst, Homer Bomberger, and Noah Hershey. Already then, one could sense among students a variety of attitudes including both submission and irritable resistance to the School’s emphasis on visible “nonconformity.” Soon thereafter, I was ordained a minister at the age of 20, in the year when John C. Wenger’s major book, *Separated Unto God* (1950), appeared. Few would then have guessed that this would be a sort of swan song on the subject for the majority of Franconia and Lancaster Mennonites. For at that moment, my Franconia Mennonite Conference still shared the blend of mission zeal and “separation” that would later become the legacy of a significant minority of Lancaster Conference membership. As a first cousin of future conservative leaders Paul M. Landis and Merle Ruth, I appreciated the spirituality and fellowship we knew in our traditional modes of worship. In fact, the manner of worship in today’s EPMC congregations comes as a startling re-experience of what was once a common, rather than minority, atmosphere (the four-part singing is better now than back then).

In both of the two historically divisive moments of the late 1950s and 1968-69, academic pursuits had me living out of my home community. This meant that I heard of disruption and

reorganization in Franconia and Lancaster only from a distance. It was certainly not good news. The earlier break in my home community involved a smaller departure than was occasioned by the later formation of the EPMC, but it was much more bitter and (painful to remember) with some un-exemplary manners on both sides. Family groupings lost contact with each other. It was in fact so wounding that not until fifty years later was there an attempt to narrate what happened by a curious descendant who needed a topic for a college essay. There were severely hurt feelings again, of course, in the 1960s, which half a century later some still think should simply be forgotten. But from a historian's point of view, to have an account like *Keeping the Trust* is a spiritual gift to anyone from either side of the various issues who is willing to learn wisdom. I commend those who have provided readers with an account such as we in Franconia should have done for our own experience.

*Trust* is a witness to the desire to maintain a continuing spirituality in a steady, rather than dynamic, mode. In the late fifties, not only the times, but the Old Mennonite Church in general, were clearly a-changing. One might put the issue this way: having rapidly gone from stressing mostly binding, were we going to react into mainly loosing? What was happening to the key motifs of nonconformity and separation? Or to the necessity of the spiritual ideal of submitting, crucifying the flesh, and accepting discipline? Where was the formerly assertive leadership in the function of discipline? Why were bishops' directives regarding television, plain attire, and divorce no longer "enforced"? Why did the Lancaster Conference need a new written discipline so soon after the one of 1954? Why was the definiteness of its strictures toned down?

I personally remember the first ominous sound of the words "drift" and "apostasy," which appear throughout the pages of *Trust*. Referring to the flexing of discipline, or lack of it, they are a solemn historical note at the heart of the EPMC's emergence and continuance. They recall a sense of necessary spiritual warfare, not against persons, but macro cultural trends. They are markers of what the concerned minority felt could not be negotiable in church life. Within a few years of the mid-sixties, the cost of standing by these convictions strained and even broke family ties, sometimes producing what conservatives felt as "slander and ridicule."

There is, as might be expected, little in this account from voices of those disagreeing with the conservative view. Totally set for the defense of what happened in EPMC's formation, *Trust* makes clear that what it calls "casual attire" is an existential issue. Covenantal identity is not to remain ambiguous, while the necessity of uniformity—not stressed as such—is assumed and expected to be a matter of conscience for every member.

A sympathetic reader from outside the EPMC will find intriguingly positive points, of which I may list five examples. (1) Whereas the scholarly researched "Anabaptist vision" emphasis among Mennonites of the 1950s and later was not seen as helpful in stemming the loss of essential faithfulness, neither was a heritage-abandoning, salvation-stressing "pietism" that, allowing faith to be invisibly inner and individualistic, was accepted by members leaving for independent churches, chapels, and worship centers. (2) There is generous recognition of the

helpfully peaceful role, during the formation of the EPMC, of such bishops as David Thomas and Raymond Charles of the Lancaster Conference, and Homer Bomberger and Isaac Sensenig among those withdrawing. (3) There is due recognition of and appreciation for the remarkableness of the Lancaster Conference's "amiable" release, which did not replicate the bitterness of former divisions. (4) There is acceptance of what happened as a divine gift to "a remnant": an opportunity for restoration and reversing the process of change by regaining "lost ground." (5) There is interesting explanation of why the emerging group, though its ordained and lay members confer on matters of faith, does not consider itself as a "conference."

Questions arising in a reader's mind include such as: (1) What issues produced some early division in the 1970s? (2) What illustrations might back up the assertion that separation and nonconformity do not hinder the witness of the church? (3) How did the withdrawal relate to the continuing evangelistic mission of the fellowship? Since the planners of this project decided to deal with the founding rather than the full history of the EPMC (certainly a defensible choice), perhaps these are issues for another book.

I would have also been helped by a chronology based on the data given in the text.

Certainly, had the story as here carefully presented been available two decades earlier, it would have enriched and more accurately focused its place in the larger *The Earth is the Lord's*. The further perspective of years during which I have observed a growing respect for the consistency of the EPMC witness, the experience of informal cooperation on historical projects, and now this book, have all confirmed for me the valuable function of shared historical insight in our too-often fractured Christian life.

Review of Loudon, Mark. 2016. *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Pp. 473.

By Steve Hartman Keiser, *Marquette University*

The title of this book neatly captures the arc of its narrative: Pennsylvania Dutch is a language—not "just a dialect." Those who speak it—though popularly perceived as peculiar—are thoroughly American; and the tale of how this language was birthed, bloomed, faded, and yet thrives into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is well worth the telling. And in this telling, Loudon succeeds in linking the lively present and future of Dutch among the plain people with its rich and revealing history among the non-plain Dutch people of Pennsylvania.

The book is structured in six chapters of approximately sixty pages each, plus a short concluding seventh chapter.

Chapter one provides an overview of the language and its name. Loudon describes the historic connections to continental German dialects of the Palatinate, while also noting the clear