



Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic (Pennsylvania German History and Culture)

Steven M. Nolt

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Historians of the early Republic are just beginning to tell the stories of the period's ethnic minorities. In *Foreigners in Their Own Land*, Steven M. Nolt is the first to add the story of the Pennsylvania Germans to that larger mosaic, showing how they came to think of themselves as quintessential Americans and simultaneously constructed a durable sense of ethnicity. The Lutheran and Reformed Pennsylvania German populations of eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Appalachian backcountry successfully combined elements of their Old World tradition with several emerging versions of national identity. Many took up democratic populist rhetoric to defend local cultural particularity and ethnic separatism. Others wedded certain American notions of reform and national purpose to Continental traditions of clerical authority and idealized German virtues. Their experience illustrates how creating and defending an ethnic identity can itself be a way of becoming American. Though they would maintain a remarkably stable and identifiable subculture well into the twentieth century, Pennsylvania Germans were, even by the eve of the Civil War, the most "inside" of "outsiders." They represent the complex and often paradoxical ways in which many Americans have managed the process of assimilation to their own advantage. Given their pioneering role in that process, their story illuminates the path that other immigrants and ethnic Americans would travel in the decades to follow.

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