

# The Real Meaning of Pennsylvania Dutch

By James M. Beidler



Artwork on a barn (possibly Pennsylvania Dutch) in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1938. (Library of Congress)

If you come from “Pennsylvania Dutch,” your ancestors may have lived in Pennsylvania, but they probably weren’t Dutch.

The so-called Pennsylvania Dutch aren’t from the Netherlands at all. They’re actually descendants of 17th- and 18th-century German-speaking immigrants in William Penn’s colony. Their language eventually evolved into a unique dialect, and these Germans made up nearly half the population of Pennsylvania at the time of the American Revolution.

The Colonial English used the term *Dutch* to describe both Germans and Netherlanders. The term may be a corruption of *Deutsch*, the German word for *German*. Or, since most of these German emigrants departed Europe from the Dutch port of Rotterdam, their embarkation point may have been remembered instead of their actual origin.

Whatever the reason, it's a tough situation to undo. The 2000 US census reported a huge upsurge in the number of Pennsylvanians who claim Dutch heritage. The confusing nomenclature is the only answer demographers could come up with. Fortunately, the problem doesn't exist for 19th-century immigrants, who are known simply as German-Americans.

[https://www.familytreemagazine.com/us/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-dutch/?trk\\_msg=QKSV0R0D2K245D6QFH8CA5O93C&trk\\_contact=19CVPEB60U6KFCLLR6S7D0C368&trk\\_module=new&trk\\_sid=SLFGEMHEG73RKB0UHPULRS4NB8&utm\\_source=Listrak&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_term=The+Real+Meaning+of+Pennsylvania+Dutch&utm\\_campaign=FT+Newsletter&utm\\_content=04-16-2021](https://www.familytreemagazine.com/us/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-dutch/?trk_msg=QKSV0R0D2K245D6QFH8CA5O93C&trk_contact=19CVPEB60U6KFCLLR6S7D0C368&trk_module=new&trk_sid=SLFGEMHEG73RKB0UHPULRS4NB8&utm_source=Listrak&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=The+Real+Meaning+of+Pennsylvania+Dutch&utm_campaign=FT+Newsletter&utm_content=04-16-2021)