



# **Serious Nonsense: Groundhog Lodges, Versammlinge, and Pennsylvania German Heritage (Keystone Books®)**

*William W. Donner*

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*Versammlinge*—community events filled with songs, performances, speeches, and skits that celebrate Pennsylvania German heritage and culture—are held entirely in the Pennsylvania German Deitsch language. Some, the “groundhog lodges,” feature a ceremony honoring the groundhog, while others do not. These unique meetings, expressions of a distinctive ethnic identity in the context of a rapidly changing society, have become a traditional mainstay among Pennsylvania Germans who have worked to preserve their language and culture into the twenty-first century.

*Serious Nonsense* introduces readers to Pennsylvania German cultural practices that tourists rarely see and that outsiders, including most scholars, rarely learn about. The book explores the origins of the *versammlinge* and details the practice’s significance since the 1930s, when the first meetings of the Pennsylvania German groundhog lodges were held. Much as they did then, *versammlinge* today follow a pattern of prayers, patriotism, and speeches extolling values associated with Pennsylvania German identity, as well as theatrical and oral events that humorously contrast a simpler past with a more complex and confusing present. And the groundhog lodges feature one Pennsylvania German tradition that has become familiar in popular culture: groundhog weather prognostication.

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