



Heart Language: Elsie Singmaster and Her Pennsylvania German Writings (Pennsylvania German History and Culture)

Susan Colestock Hill

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At the turn of the twentieth century, American popular literary magazines and journals pulsed with local-color fiction, seeking to satisfy a national hunger for American identity. Anxiety over increasing numbers of “new stock” immigrants—and the changing face of an industrializing America—gave rise to greater popular interest in stories with a simple focus on localized folk culture and “old stock” immigrant tradition. In the footsteps of writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sarah Orne Jewett, the Pennsylvania German writings of Elsie Singmaster emerged to great popularity and acclaim.

Born and raised in the Pennsylvania German tradition, Elsie Singmaster wrote extensively over the first half of the twentieth century. Through her intimate knowledge of the community, Singmaster exposed the nation’s expanding readership to Pennsylvania German beliefs, culture, and distinct dialect without denigrating the community or resorting to stereotypes. She believed that the Pennsylvania Germans embodied the best of the nation’s ideals, and she crafted her characters and stories to participate in the national dialogue about immigration, development, and the definition of a hardworking, middle-class sensibility grounded in Old World traditions. While Singmaster’s work fell out of sight as the century wore on, her writings remain a significant contribution to the study of both Pennsylvania German history and culture and the literature of the last century. This volume restores to print sixteen of Singmaster’s short stories, reintroducing these important works into a new context of American development.

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