



Tillie, a Mennonite Maid; a Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch

Helen Reimensnyder Martin

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Tillie, a Mennonite Maid; a Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch Details

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From Reader Review Tillie, a Mennonite Maid; a Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch for online ebook

Barbara says

This story was written in 1904, and tells the story of a Mennonite maid and the struggles she has because her interests and views are so different from those of her community, and especially her father. The story is interesting, but its writing style reminds me more of older children's literature than adult literature. It is a quaint tale, and shows the value of reading and education.

Marjorie Sapp says

Great characters

Great characters

I loved the characters in this book from the comical doctor to the "teacher" and even the dad. I do think in the writing at times it makes the "Mennonites" to look like ignorant people.

Sidney Weber says

Terrific

This book immediately captures and holds the attention and sympathy of the reader for its heroine. The plot moves forward continuously in a seemingly realistic manner despite a setting far from the American mainstream.

Teresa says

Another Good Book written in late 1800's.

Julie says

Quick read. Really it is just a novella due to its length. It's an okay story that would have benefitted from being developed into a full novel.

Sarah says

More Pennsylvania Dutch nonsense from HRM. Thinking about the primitivist aspect.

Amy Griffith says

I didn't care for this book at all. I found it far too critical of religion.

Angie Fehl says

Surprisingly powerful story about a young woman simultaneously fighting an oppressive father, single-handedly pursuing a degree (without help or support from family), discovering first love, and trying to decipher her true religious beliefs. Beautiful story about going after what's important to you - despite the obstacles you may have thrown at you!

Teri Pre says

Once you get past the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, this is a pretty good read. It's the tale of a girl's struggle for education in spite of her over-bearing father. I enjoyed it.

Crystal says

Pop Sugar's 2018 reading challenge included one prompt "tied to your heritage". It turns out that books about PA Dutch families who AREN'T Amish are actually difficult to come by. The majority of my extended family has been Mennonite since they before they left Europe. I grew up conservative Mennonite--technology and electricity were fine. Fancy or immodest clothing, jewelry or make up, secular music, and television or movies were not. oh, and fancy cars. Anyway, trying to find books that dealt with traditional Mennonites in Europe or North America was very challenging. Then I found this book, in one of my Google searches. Tillie, a Mennonite maid. sounds appropriate.

And it was. it was so similar to so much of my upbringing, my neighborhood, my culture, the stories I heard about my ancestors and about other families that it is almost uncomfortable to discuss the book in a review. I feel like this should be for private journaling instead.

In tone, the story read like a cross between L.M. Montgomery's works (maybe more Emily of New Moon than Anne of Green Gables) mixed with Jane Eyre, but with the heroine's family still alive, and the story set in PA Dutch country. Records for the book, even here on Goodreads, are sort of sketchy, with only the date of republication, so I went to Google again, and Helen Reimensnyder Martin published Tillie in 1904. That was probably part of the reason for the similarities I noticed to Montgomery's books--the emphasis on slim bodies and intelligent, delicate faces, using externals to indicate internal intelligence and character. The heroine's instinctive love of nature and books and learning was similar as well.

However, the similarities to Jane Eyre lay in the gauntness and gloom of Tillie's childhood. The harsh reality of farm work drudgery every waking hour of her childhood, with only violent corporal punishment waiting for any infractions against rules, perceived negative attitudes, or slacking at her work. Tillie's family is harsh and another child might have felt hopeless and given up entirely. But Tillie has a light inside of her that compels her on, much like Jane did. Like Jane and Anne, Tillie also has a formative character, a friend and mentor, in her life, a strong and intelligent female teacher who gives her the inspiration to carry on her

education and better herself. The inner core of strength and determination, the sense of "otherness" from the majority of one's family and culture and even church, and the unflinching sense of ethics and morality all feel similar to Jane (and are something I identify with, whether I perfectly personify them or not). But the world setting is so very different from either Montgomery or Eyre's writing. The PA Dutch world the author creates might feel not only foreign but also unrealistic to readers from outside the culture--but as one who grew up in that area, in that culture, I can tell you that so much of what she wrote, including all the terrible things, sadly is not. I know parents who told their children that they'd only had children so they could work and could take care of the parents when the parents got old. Parents who sent their children to private religious schools, but made them work on the farm from dusk til dawn whenever they weren't in school to "earn" their own schooling (without the option to say 'no thanks, I'll take that free public education and some free time instead'). Parents who beat their children (and dogs) with chains and rubber hoses, as well as switches and belts and whatever else came to hand, for any perceived infractions. Who only allowed their children Sunday afternoons to play. Patriarchs of families who said that the bodies of his children (and later, grandchildren) were his to do with as he pleased (i.e. sexual abuse). Parents who told their children that if they REALLY HAD TO go to college, why not attend night school so they could pay their way as they went? I could go on and on, but that's not what this review is for. This is only to say, that the dysfunctional families, with their suspicion of education and the outside world, depicted here in the book are not out of the realm of possibility or even likelihood in the culture and era Reimensnyder Martin depicts.

At the same time, many PA Dutch families in my experience were like not like that, and so I equally appreciated the depiction of families like that of Tillie's aunt and uncle, affectionate and humorous, uneducated and simple that they were. People who loved their children and tried to provide for successful lives for them as much as they knew how. In their own way, Tillie's aunt and uncle, and the reprobate doctor, with his lack of book learning, all contributed as much to Tillie's success as her beloved Miss Margaret. Also completely realistic, and incredibly familiar to me, were the language patterns recorded here. Going to do something "oncet". Husbands referring to their wives as "mom." Children calling their parents "pop". Saying that something was "all", when it was all gone. and so many other words and phrases I recognized and understood immediately. I can see how reading this book might actually be challenging for a reader with no background in PA Dutch culture and accents, but it certainly reads true to life, and brought back memories of grandparents and aunts and uncles in my childhood.

The depiction of various religious denominations in their area also rang true. I am not as familiar with the PA Dutch "evangelicals" as I am with Mennonites, for obvious reasons mentioned above, and I'm not sure what the difference was between the "New Mennonites" (which sound like my family's denomination) and current conservative Mennonites. What were "old Mennonites"? I don't know. I also recognized the mentions of Dunkard Brethren and Amish, although I was surprised that at this point, Amish children went to school with children from other religious sects.

As to the structure of the story, I'm not sure I can really critique. I have so much memory and emotion, both good and bad, tied up in the culture this book brought back to life for me, that it's difficult to judge objectively. I will say that it was difficult for me to put the book down. I viscerally hated her father, was disgusted by Absalom, felt sympathy for Tillie's stepmom and siblings life of drudgery, and cheered for Tillie's success. I liked the feisty, tricky old Doc and the honorable, youthful Fairchilds. I really liked Tillie, her quiet inner core of strength and determination, her scrupulous values, her innate intelligence and sense of refinement, her appreciation of education and beauty and nature, and her search for spiritual truth. I read the book in a few days, and feel like it's one of the few books I may actually pick back up and reread in the future, to see what else I missed (and to reread all the lines I highlighted).

If you want a book that gives you a realistic sense of historic Pennsylvania Dutch culture, both Mennonite and 'evangelical', and you don't mind working your way through language that may seem confusing at first, I do recommend this book. I have found few others like it.

Rachel Cross says

3.5

A 4 for the courage of the heroine Tillie but a 3 for all the fainting she did. Oppression from any home of any religion can be a mountainous thing to get away from but any kindness shown to the oppressed is a light of hope and love that can cause a person to grow wings and fly away. So this book was ok for the era in which it was written.

Candy Hodges-george says

Good

Very good, wonderful good love story, good story of rags to riches would read again. Would recommend to a friend

Bonnie Finney says

Good story line

Held my interest, wanted to keep reading until I was finished reading the book. Good story line no profanity except for one.

Trae says

I found this book when I was searching for genealogical references to my family history. I have Pennsylvania Dutch in my family as well as a woman named Tillie. I felt like I was reading a diary of a girl from the time period.

I really want my teenage daughter to read it as I think it is a great story to teach her about reaching for her own self confidence. It was a quick read and a wonderful story to give me perspective of the time period. I would read it again, I really enjoyed it.

jane Hicken says

Anyone can dream &do it!

This book, at first, I thought wasn't going to be that good. As I continue he'd, it became better & better. It was a fight against home and the struggle between right vs. wrong. I thoroughly enjoyed this read.I would recommend to anyone who loves Old Mennonite novels! Wonderful!!!
