

"Amish/Mennonites In Casey County"

Alta Grider
Oral History #566
Dr. L. Montell
March 17, 1989

Amish/Mennonites In Casey County

The four interviews I did were with Mennonites in Casey County. I found the Mennonites live a much different lifestyle than we do in Casey County. When I arrived at each of the homes, I found them to be very busy and serious people. They appear to be very kind and humble people, as well as religious people of strong faith in Jesus Christ.

I have learned from my readings and interviews that the ~~AMISH~~ Mennonite order is older than the Amish group. It is believed that Menno Simmons, leader of the Mennonites, dismissed people from their order for breaking various rules of the order. Because a man named Jacob Ammann thought that Simmons was too soft about letting stray members back into the group, he broke away and formed his Amish group. The Amish are stricter, more somber, most always dress in black, and usually the ones in horse and buggy. Many Mennonites do drive cars, though not fancy ones, have electricity, and utilize running water.

The Amish/Mennonites seem to all have large families. They said in the interviews, "As God blesses, they do have many Children." Mennonites and Amish people feel that if God gives them children, they can provide for them with God's help.

It's usually fairly easy to recognize the Amish/Mennonite people. The women wear head coverings, and ankle-length

dresses. The men have beards and wear suspenders, and hats, all of dark colors usually. They do not listen to radios, watch T.V., drink alcoholic beverages, smoke, or raise tobacco. This was one of their concerns when I interviewed them - being in a paper, etc. They do not desire publicity.¹

The Amish/Mennonites do not celebrate Christmas, and do not believe in Santa Claus.

I found that the Mennonites I interviewed did not desire an education beyond eighth grade. But if someone in their order desired an education beyond eighth grade, it is fine with them. They stated in the interview that they could further their education beyond eighth grade by taking correspondence courses. They said this was unusual with their people, that most children want to quit after eighth grade and work on the farm. etc.

Of the four Mennonite families that I interviewed, I found that most of them did some farm work. One of the Mennonite families ran a country grocery store in a very small community in Casey County. Another family had a wood craft store where they "hand-make" furniture and sell it. It was very interesting sitting in the upstairs area of the wood craft shop, and watching the customers come and go. It appeared to be quite a busy business.

The Amish group originated in Switzerland. Amish teach separation from the world. They do not go to war, swear oaths,

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or hold public office. They have no electricity or phones, and members meet in their homes every two weeks for worship. Those who break with the old order usually join the Mennonites.

The Amish first came to North America in 1728. They now live in 23 states and Ontario. The largest communities are found in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois.

Settlements are divided into "church districts " that are autonomous congregations composed of about 75 baptized members. If the district becomes much larger, it is again divided because the members meet in each others homes. There are no church buildings. Each district has a bishop, two to four preachers, and an elder.²

Holy Communion is celebrated twice each year, and both Amish and Mennonite practice foot washing. Adults are baptized when they are admitted to formal membership in the church at about ages 17 to 20.

There are many branches of Mennonites. First Mennonites belong to a church organized in Switzerland in 1525, called themselves Swiss Brethren. They were nicknamed Anabaptists (rebaptizers). The name came from Menno Simmons, a Roman Catholic priest who led the Anabaptists in the Netherlands, and Northern Germany in the 1530's.

Mennonites later split into groups, including the Amish. The Mennonites were persecuted in many countries. Swiss Mennonites moved to Pennsylvania in 1683's.³

Amish are more conservative than Mennonites. Mennonites are more liberal as a general rule.

In interviewing the Amish/Mennonites I found that they do not seek the help of doctors and medicines until it is a "must." This reminds me of an article I had read in the newspaper a few weeks ago about an Amish boy dying at the age of six with cancer. The family refused treatments for the cancer, and the father spent time in jail because he wouldn't turn the child over to state officials for treatment.

The Amish are known as some of the world's best farmers. The sun is more of a clock for the Amish, as work begins before sunrise and continues until after sunset. The Amish families usually grow large gardens of food near their homes.⁴

Most social activities take place close to home, the fields, and nature. A walk down the lane is a common method of visiting in a world with no telephones, no radio, and no television. The natural sounds and smells permeate even social activities.⁵

The Amish are not against education, but are cautious about the influence consolidated schools may have on the important values of lives.⁶

Most Amish have one room for grades one through eight. They have one teacher for all eight grades. The younger children learn by listening to the older pupils recite

their lessons. The Amish schools do meet state standards concerning the number of days, and the length of school days. Teachers are often young Amish women who have not yet married. Occasionally the teacher will be a non-Amish person who is trusted by the parents.

Parents are involved in the Amish schools. Parents help clean the schools at the end of summer, and often visit the schools unannounced.⁷

Most weddings among the Amish take place after the harvest in November and December. The wedding day begins as early as 5 a.m. and continues until late at night. Guests arrive before dawn, and are greeted by a handshake from the bride and groom. Usually the bride makes her own dress, etc. Weddings are usually held on Tuesdays and Thursdays. White clothing for weddings is not a tradition with the Amish people. It's usually dark colors. Wedding time is followed by the season of bearing children.⁸

Amish do not go on honeymoons as we know it. They do not live together until they set up housekeeping the following spring. They get together on weekends and visit different family members. Divorce is just almost nonexistent among the Amish.⁹ One of the questions I asked in my interview was "What happens when divorce does occur with one of your couples?" All four interviewees answered by saying "they have to leave

the church, and can't be one of the members any longer.

Amish and Mennonites just do not believe in divorce!

When we were discussing the large families, I found that sons were not desired over daughters. I found this to be somewhat of a surprise.

In discussing their religion, I found them to be strong believers in Jesus Christ. They appear to live by faith a great deal. They are believers that God will take care of them. They believe that you must live a clean religious close life with Jesus Christ. They believe in Heaven and Hell as most of us do.

These people appeared to have no problems with our government. In some of the interviews they stated that the government could help them by lowering their taxes.

In earning a living among the Amish were jobs such as farming, woodworking shops, carpenters, etc. And their women very seldom work outside the community as we do.

They feel that it's their duty to work in the home with the children.

Interviewing four Amish/Mennonite families was quite an interesting experience for me. It was a sunny, beautiful March afternoon, and as I drove up the country road known as South Fork, all the Amish/Mennonites homes all had the same appearance. They were all dressed similar. The second home I went into the large family were all gathered around

the table having lunch. There was an aroma in the air as I walked in of a good "country cooked" meal.

I found the Amish/Mennonite people to be very respectful, well-mannered, and kind people. I felt somewhat like I was imposing, as they seemed to be anxious to get back to their work. They appear to be very hard-working people.

I enjoyed my interviews with the Amish/Mennonite families a great deal. I am sure they think our lifestyles are just as different as I think their lifestyles are very different and unique!

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Footnotes

¹Dick Kaukas, A Simple Life (Louisville, Kentucky: The Courier-Journal), Dec. 1988.

²The World Book Encyclopedia, Book A, pages 408-409.

³The World Book Encyclopedia, Book M, pages 325-326.

⁴Merle Good, Who Are The Amish ? (Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1985), page 19.

⁵Merle Good, Who Are The Amish? (Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1985), page 25.

⁶Merle Good, Who Are The Amish? (Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1985), page 28.

⁷Merle Good, Who Are The Amish? (Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1985), page 29.

⁸Merle Good, Who Are The AMish? (INtercourse, Pennsylvania, 1985), page 44.

⁹James A. Warner & Donald M. Denlinger, The Gentle People (New York, 1969) page 87.

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