Who Are the Amish?

Amish is a Christian religion that's also a complete lifestyle. Some people wind themselves up for an hour of religion every Sunday, but the Amish base their entire lives around their religion. It defines how they dress, travel, and work.The Amish are Anabaptists, meaning that they believe in adult baptism. Because of that belief, many young people own cars and boats on Amish property. Until they choose to join the church, usually when they prepare to marry, young people aren't officially Amish. That allows them to own cars and boats and anything else that they choose.

The Amish religion actually encourages young people to experience the outside world for awhile. The theory is that they'll choose the Amish life over the "English" life, and the statistics support the theory. Most people born into the Amish faith choose to join the church, and those who do leave find that the glitter of the outside world isn't necessarily better than the closely bound community in which they grew up. Subsequently, many return to the faith.

Thus, schoolchildren aren't officially Amish, neither are many teenagers, and if you can recognize their dress, you may see them filling up their cars and trucks at gas stations along Route 340 on a Sunday afternoon. That may not conform to outsiders' ideas of what the Amish should be, but they're really not concerned with others' opinions.

Wash day, Amish farm

Amish school, Stumptown Road

What matter most to the Amish are God, family, and work. Their choice not to embrace much that is modern doesn't come from a belief that modern things are inherently evil. Instead, it comes from a judgment of what's best for their families and for their community as a whole.

For example, the Amish don't believe that cars, buses, and bicycles are bad things. Instead, they've made the judgment that a man who owns a car might spend his nights away from home instead of with his family, so they choose not to use cars—which doesn't mean that they never travel by motor vehicle.

The Amish of Lancaster County often travel to a community near Sarasota, Florida, and they use motor vehicles to get there. Some Amish farm down there, and many others vacation there. During the winter months, a bus company in Lancaster County makes regular runs to Florida. Around Lancaster County, some people make a living transporting the Amish over distances that are too much for a buggy, so it's inaccurate to say that the Amish never use cars and buses.

They also use electricity, but they won't buy it from public utility companies. Instead, they produce their own from various sources. And they're not immune from government regulations. They pay taxes and they must keep the milk they produce refrigerated until a truck picks it up.

A list of written or oral rules, known as Ordnung, defines all aspects of Amish life. The rules in Ordnung explain the basics of the faith and help to define what it means to be Amish. For an Amish person, the Ordnung describes almost every part of life, from dress and hair length to buggy style and farming techniques. The Ordnung will vary from community to community and order to order, which explains why you will see some Amish using electricity and riding in automobiles, while others don't even accept the use of battery-powered lights.

Lancaster's Amish are relatively progressive. Other Amish groups, such as the Nebraska Amish (who have a settlement near State College in central Pennsylvania), almost totally reject modern technology.

Cows

A sign you won't see everywhere

Amish Education

Amish children receive eight years of schooling, all in the same one-room school, which is generally very close to home. Throughout Lancaster County there are more than one hundred fifty one-room schools, about $^{2}/_{3}$ Amish and $^{1}/_{3}$ Mennonite. The schools teach basic skills but not religion. That's a job for the parents. The fathers take care of the school buildings, and it's not unusual to see sheep mowing the grass at an Amish school.

Despite the relatively short duration of their schooling, the Amish learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic very well, and many are excellent business owners. From early childhood, they learn lessons of responsibility, hard work, and efficiency at home. These are lessons that come in handy when running a farm and a business.

The history of Amish parochial schools is actually rather short, and it wasn't a religious issue that led them to establish their own schools. Until the late 1930s, Amish children went to public schools. Then, the issues of consolidation and busing inspired the Amish to develop their own school system.

When public schools were small and local, parents felt that they had a measure of control over what went on inside, so the idea of sending their children many miles away to go to school just didn't work for the Amish. They feared losing control of what their children would learn, and busing had a very practical drawback. Time spent on a bus was time not spent working on the farm.

After many years of debate with government officials, the Supreme Court, in 1972, decided that the Amish had the right to educate their children as they chose, and the Amish school system has been growing ever since, as has the Mennonite school system.

How can you tell the difference between the schools of the Amish and the Mennonites? Here's a *wheel* good clue. At Amish schools, you'll see scooters. At Mennonite schools, you'll see bicycles. Generally, the Amish don't use bicycles, but

Mennonite school, Terre Hill

for Mennonites, they're an important mode of transportation. If you see a school with both bicycles and scooters on the campus, it's a school with both Amish and Mennonite students.

Where Are the Amish?

Overall, the Amish are in twenty states in America and in Canada, with the largest populations being in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Holmes County, Ohio, has the largest Amish population, about eighteen thousand, a number slightly larger than that of Lancaster County.

Lancaster County's Amish population would be larger if more farms were available, but the county is full, and some Amish families from Lancaster County have moved to neighboring counties and out of the area. Lebanon, York, Chester, and Berks counties all border Lancaster County and all have Amish populations.

Within Lancaster County, the eastern part of the county—around the towns of New Holland, Bird-in-Hand, Intercourse, Paradise, and Strasburg—has been and still is the traditional Amish stronghold. Not coincidentally, that's the region that is home to the vast majority of Lancaster County's tourist attractions. All of the businesses and tourist attractions with *Amish* in their names are in the eastern part of the county, along routes 340, 30, 741, and 896.

The Amish stronghold is in the eastern parts, but the Amish are moving to other parts of the county as well. They now have districts around Manheim in the northwest and Quarryville in the south. They go where the farms are, and in Lancaster County, farms are everywhere. Many residents of Lancaster would like to see the Amish buy up every farm in the county, so that the developers couldn't turn them into houses and shopping centers.

The Amish and Money

The Amish are frugal, not poor. In their culture, the acquisition of wealth simply for the sake of having impressive material goods is unacceptable. But that doesn't mean that they

Donkeys

don't have any money. In fact, their farms have much value just for the land, and they run some very successful nonfarm businesses. When they do make money, their preferred use is to buy more farms for their children.

The Amish and Work

For many people, work is a means to an end. Work is the

means to pay the bills and have fun. To the Amish, work is something different. It's a way to make money to pay the bills, but it also has its own inherent worth. The Amish work because their faith tells them that work has value. Besides, they don't have televisions to sit in front of all day.

Where the Mennonites Are

Mennonites are another Anabaptist sect, and they have the same religious roots as the Amish. In fact, the Amish broke off from the Mennonites in Europe back in the seventeenth century. Today, Mennonites are much more numerous than the Amish, and Mennonites come in many degrees of worldliness. They live in cities and have high schools and universities. They also have Old Order Mennonites who drive buggies and Black Bumper Mennonites who drive cars—but only cars that are black all over, including the bumpers.

Mennonites live everywhere, from New York City to missions in Africa to farms in rural Lancaster County. The Amish and Mennonites have differences in dress and in the styles of their buggies, but to someone who has never seen either group before, they do look very similar.

Some Mennonite children go to school for only eight years, arriving by buggy, but other Mennonite students drive cars to Lancaster Mennonite High School, and its athletic teams compete with local public schools in many sports. From there, students move on to Eastern Mennonite University and other Mennonite colleges and universities, as well as to secular institutions.

Tourists have followed the Amish closely but have paid little attention to the Mennonites. Lancaster County has a Mennonite Information Center and more Mennonites than Amish, but the title of this book doesn't contain the word *Mennonite*.

What that means is that if you want to get a look at the real Lancaster County, specifically the rural places where the tourists rarely venture, you'll do just as well to travel through

Mennonite areas and Amish areas. To the untrained eye, a Mennonite buggy looks like an Amish buggy, but in Mennonite areas, tourists are far fewer in numbers.

The highest concentration of Mennonites is in the northeastern part of Lancaster County, in places such as Martindale, Terre Hill, and Farmersville. On those roads, you'll see many bicycles, and in 2002, a Mennonite resident of Farmersville rode his bike much faster than the Mennonite girls in pastel dresses ever ride over those country roads. Floyd Landis, a graduate of Conestoga Valley High School in Lancaster, completed the Tour de France as a teammate of Lance Armstrong. Local papers carried the story that his mother had to go to a friend's home to watch her son on television because her family has never had a television in the home. Another story said that Floyd Landis had to ask permission from his pastor to wear the flashy spandex uniforms that cyclists favor.

On the roads around Farmersville, bikes and buggies are just about as common as cars, and on Sunday mornings, the roads are full of bikes, buggies, and black-bumper cars, all heading to church. It's a sight that you won't see on the streets of New York or Philadelphia.

A6mish and Mennonite History

In 1536, Menno Simons, a Catholic priest from Holland, joined the Anabaptist movement. He had the ability to unite many of the Anabaptist groups, and they subsequently acquired the nickname Mennonites.

In 1693, Jakob Ammann, a Swiss bishop, broke away from the main group of Mennonites, and his followers became the Amish. The groups have differences in beliefs, and they have split several times, but the Amish and Mennonite churches still share the same beliefs concerning adult baptism and many aspects of faith.

As part of William Penn's "holy experiment" of religious tolerance and freedom, the Amish and Mennonites both settled in Pennsylvania. The first sizable group of Amish arrived in Lancaster County in the 1720s or 1730s.


ROY S. ZIMMERMAN
508 WHITE OAK ROAD
NEW HOLLAND PA
ARE YOU REJECTING JESUS?
READ ISAIAH 53:1-3
508

Sign


..Believe on the Lord
JESUS CHRIST and
Thou shalt be saved..
Acts 16:31

Sign

While both groups' beliefs have many similarities, they're distinctly different in some ways. For example, the Mennonites have churches, while the Amish conduct their worship services in congregation at members' homes on a rotating basis. Together, they make up a rather small percentage of Lancaster County's residents, but they own a large percentage of the land, and their buggies are an image closely associated with Lancaster County.

Lancaster County also has a third group of Anabaptists: the Brethren. They get little publicity, but they're an important part of the Lancaster community.

Pennsylvania Dutch Stuff

The term *Pennsylvania Dutch* is common in Lancaster and the surrounding counties. It describes both a people and a culture, but it has nothing to do with Holland.

In this instance, *Dutch* is an altered spelling of *Deutsche*—German. Many of the residents of south-central Pennsylvania can trace their roots to Germany and countries where German is a common language, and *Pennsylvania Dutch* refers to these people.

The Amish are a part of the Pennsylvania Dutch, but not all Pennsylvania Dutch people are Amish. They come in many religions, and they live in many counties. They even have their own Pennsylvania Dutch language and a distinctive accent. Across the region you'll see the word *Dutch* in the names of many sorts of businesses, from Dutch Wonderland Amusement Park to Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre.

You may even hear a slogan describing the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage: "If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much." If you do hear it, though, take it with a chuckle. Pennsylvania Dutch people are, as a group, hardworking, humble, and helpful.